Business, Sports & Life

MINDSET SECRETS *for* WINNING

How to Bring Personal Power to Everything You Do

EXPANDED EDITION
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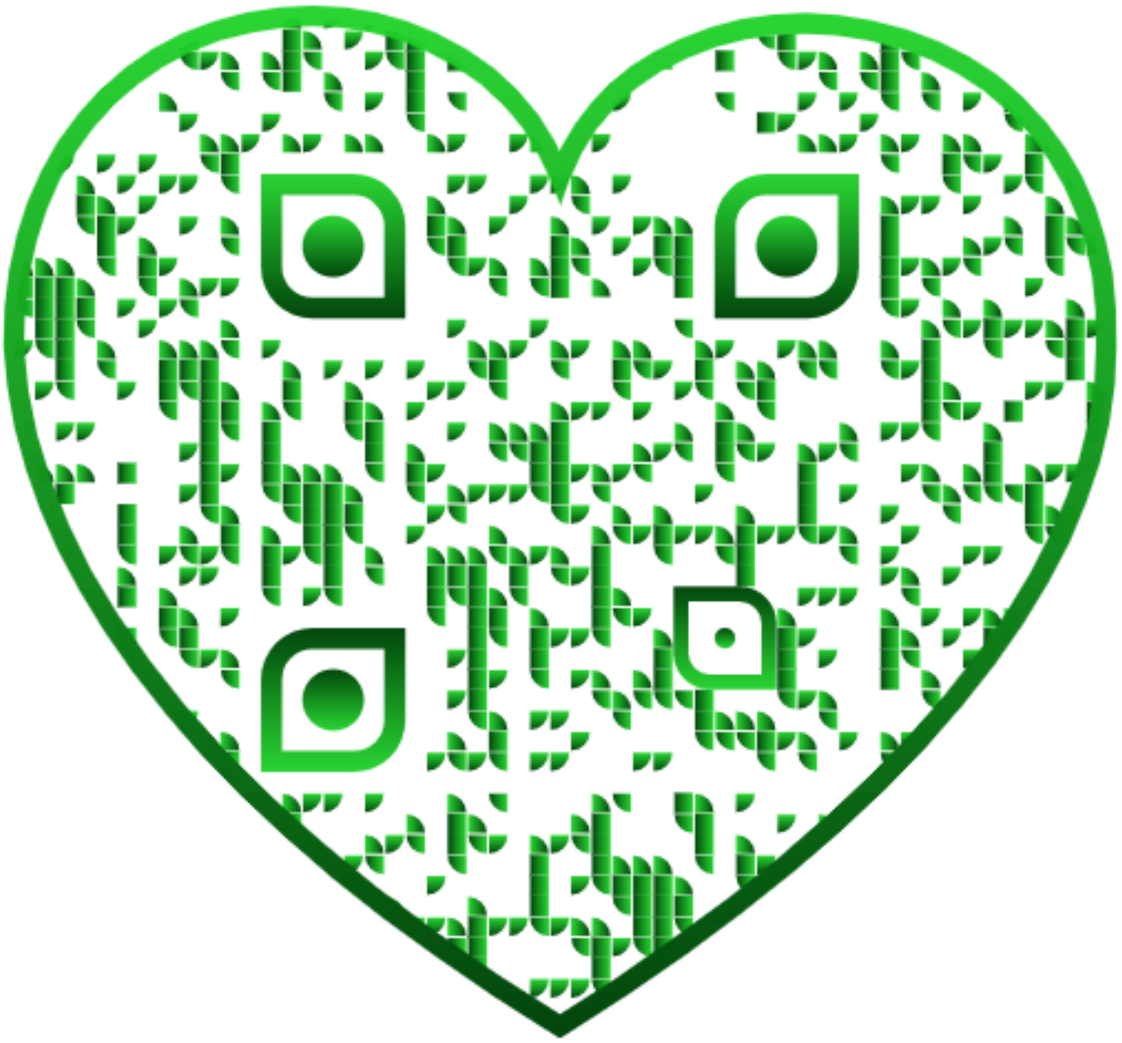
Mastering Perfect Practice

MARK MINERVINI

#1 Best-Selling Author



MINDSET SECRETS *for* WINNING

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Access Publishing Group

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CONTENTS

A Message from the Author
Introduction: With Winning in Mind

PART 1

Mastering Your Mindset

1 The Believing Brain
2 The Seven Noble Truths of a Winner
3 Building the Self-Image of a Champion
4 Expectancy—The Key to Commitment and Persistence
5 The Moment of Decision
6 Prioritizing Your Passion and Goal Getting

PART 2

Mastering Perfect Practice

7 How to Structure Your Practice Sessions
8 Visualization and Rehearsal
9 Preparing for Your Big Day
10 Performance Time

BONUS CHAPTER

11 Living with Intention

About the Author
Acknowledgments
Special Dedication

A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

In writing *Mindset Secrets for Winning*, I drew upon many aspects of my life, from business to sports, struggles to triumphs, and rags to riches. I researched broadly, from the preparation of Olympic athletes to the techniques of the world's best coaches, as well as to every influential aspect in the lives of the successful elite. As a peak performance book, *Mindset Secrets for Winning* often emphasizes examples from sports, but it is certainly not limited to athletics. Those who want to become the best version of themselves in whatever they do will benefit from this book. I encourage all readers to keep an open mind to gather insights that apply to their own lives. It's important to read the entire book, as each section builds on the previous section. In all your pursuits, I wish you the best.

—MARK MINERVINI

INTRODUCTION

WITH WINNING IN MIND

What makes a person extraordinary—a top achiever, a winner, a champion? For all of my adult life, I've been fascinated with this question as I studied how elite performers from every corner of the world become the best in their fields. Here's what I learned: Virtually all the highest achievers agree that the mental side of training is just as important as the physical side. After winning seven Olympic gold medals, Mark Spitz said, "The difference between winning and losing is 99 percent psychological." Golfing legend Jack Nicklaus wrote that mental preparation is the single-most critical element in peak performance. Yet outside this select group, few individuals have a specific mental strategy to improve and optimize their thinking to achieve success. While the human body has its natural limits, the mind's potential is unlimited. This has been pivotal for me: By changing my thinking, I transformed my life. And so can you!

Every day, I apply what I've learned from a lifetime of discovery to create my own success, and not just financially. By doing what inspires me, I can pursue what I am most passionate about and shape my own destiny. In this book, I share the specific mindset "secrets" that have made a difference not only in my performance, but also in the quality of my life. My goal is to share the key takeaways and mental techniques I've learned over the years—techniques that I have used to win—so you can put these lessons into practice in your own endeavors.

We will explore the important changes I made personally and what I have found to be the key psychological traits that separate champion performers from the average person. Even more enlightening, you will learn how to use these principles as building blocks to form the foundation of your own success. It's not just about winning; it's succeeding, with the fulfillment that comes from tapping the power of passion.

This is not your ordinary peak performance book. I am not a psychologist, nor do I hold a PhD in human behavior, but I am an expert on winning and success. What I know is not based on academic theory or gleaned simply from observation. Rather, it is what I practice in my daily life; it's simply what works. This is what has allowed me to become extremely successful as judged by conventional measures and what continues to work today.

Having dedicated more than three decades to the study of personal growth and human excellence, I can assure you that what I'm about to share are the common threads running through every champion, regardless of background. I call them "Empowerment Principles," which I have applied to my career, my hobbies, and every other aspect of my personal life journey.

The first thing you need to know about winning is simple: If you don't have the right mindset, then your knowledge, practice, and even skills will be rendered ineffective when you need them most—in the real world. The key is to develop the mindset of a winner. Your intellectual ability must be as robust as your physical ability. You need to develop a reliable way of thinking that can be applied to any endeavor to give yourself the champion's advantage.

The following pages contain powerful ideas and strategies that, if applied, can help anyone become more effective and successful in business, sports, and life. By understanding how to apply these techniques and practices, you will have a road map and a well-calibrated compass. As a result, you will be more capable of performing at a high level and achieving your dreams faster than you ever imagined.

The good news is that everything you need to succeed is here, right now. In fact, it's been here all along, just waiting for you to become congruent with it. This is not just about self-improvement; it's about self-discovery, because you already have the potential. It's just a matter of learning how to access and use your own personal power.

THE MEANING OF SUCCESS

Early on in life, success has a certain meaning. For most, success generally means having money, possessions, and status. For me, becoming one of the best stock traders in the world obviously meant financial success. Making lots of money was definitely one of my goals, but money without a purpose isn't anything worth bragging about. My mother used to say, "Money, itself, is just paper, good for starting a fire and keeping warm if the world comes to an end." She made me realize that its value comes from what it can provide or enable: freedom, lifestyle, job creation, philanthropy.

Success is not only about winning against an opponent or performing in front of an audience but winning inside. It's feeling accomplished and purposeful as you live the life you've always imagined. For the first half of my life, I devoted myself to becoming a winner in the financial sense. Over time, though, I learned that while money is great to have, by itself it could never make me happy. I realized that I did not want to be just financially successful; I wanted to be happy and fulfilled. **Success is about reaching your own goal. Whether that goal is to win gold at the Olympics, be a role model to someone, or play in a local softball tournament, success is personal.** I realized that if I couldn't leverage my accomplishments to somehow help others and grow spiritually, then I would achieve very little. Achieving my earlier goals led to greater, more meaningful goals.

When I was a young man and first ventured into the world of high finance, my mother wished me success in a greeting card that I've kept framed on my desk ever since. It contains her best wishes, love, and the following words, which always helped me keep things in perspective:

Success

To laugh often and much; To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

IT'S NOT HOW YOU START, BUT WHERE YOU FINISH

When I was a small boy, I dreamed about becoming rich and successful one day. But my reality at that time was a very different story. Growing up in poverty, I watched my mother struggle and worry constantly about making ends meet. As a child, I grew up in a difficult

and dangerous environment. Life was hard, and I was a scared young boy, lacking in confidence. Violence, crime, and dysfunction were all around me. My mother, realizing that I needed better surroundings, moved us into a small apartment out of the city, in a rural part of the state where I made new friends and began a new life.

I can remember going over to a friend's house for the first time. He lived in a middle-class neighborhood in a home with a finished basement, a 25-inch color TV, and a fireplace. "Oh boy," I thought. "He's rich!" His home had nice furniture, and his father had a fancy office with a big green leather chair behind a glossy cherrywood desk. When I looked into the backyard, there was a pool! I was amazed that someone could live in such "opulence."

Later that year, my father took me with him to a meeting with his lawyer. When we walked into his office, the attorney sat back in a big green leather chair. It was tufted with brass rivets, just like the one at my friend's house in his father's office. I told myself that this must be what rich people sit in—like a throne of dignity. To me, that chair spelled success. Twenty years later, when I started to have some success of my own, the first thing I did was go to a fine furniture store and spend $4,200 to buy a chair just like it. You may be saying "Four grand, for a chair?" Yes, and I thoroughly enjoyed shelling out the cash for that overpriced chair because it made me feel like a winner.

People say "Winning isn't everything." Don't kid yourself: Losing sucks! You show me a "good" loser, and I'll show you someone who makes losing a habit. The difference between winning and losing is not just technical ability—having the right skills and knowing what to do. It's the mental game that really separates the top performers from everyone else.

Those who meet me now cannot imagine that, at one time, I lacked confidence and assertiveness and was unsuccessful, but that's the truth. When you grow up in an underprivileged environment, often it is conveyed to you that wealth and success are some mysterious gift reserved for a special group of individuals. I never bought into that because I always knew there was much more to life than my current circumstances. This is a story about what I did to find my place in the world and become a winner.

If you're young and just starting out, your dreams are attainable, regardless of where you come from or how you got your start. If you're at the stage of life where you dream about reinventing yourself, or if you have given up on your dreams, it's never too late to have higher standards. Reading this book just once may not miraculously change your life. But I can tell you that these principles have definitely changed mine. As Jim Rohn, entrepreneur and motivational speaker, said, "Success is nothing more than a few simple disciplines, practiced every day."

In this book, you will find disciplines that make winners win and dreamers reach their dreams.

A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION

I didn't start out with sound principles for success. I acquired them over a lifetime of experiences, mostly from making mistakes and learning from other people who knew things I couldn't yet see. I used these tools and tactics to elevate myself from the depths of poverty to a level of success that I once only dreamed about. Most would agree that I'm about as rags-to-riches as you'll find anywhere. Starting with only a few thousand dollars and a meager eighth-grade education (yes, I dropped out of school at age 15), I parlayed the only things I had—a dream and the willingness to learn and persist—into a personal fortune, becoming a multimillionaire from stock trading by the age of 31.

Then, in 1997, I set out to prove I was one of the best stock traders in the world. I put up $250,000 of my own hard-earned capital (money I had built up from just a few thousand dollars) and entered the prestigious U.S. Investing Championship, a real-money investment

derby where some of the best in the business went head-to-head trading stocks, options, and futures. The rules were simple: The investor with the biggest percentage return on his or her money after one full calendar year of trading won.

Twelve months later I was crowned U.S. Investing Champion. My stock account was up 155 percent (turning my $250,000 into $637,500), a percentage return that beat out hundreds of the best money managers in America. Then I started my own Wall Street firm, where I was up against full-blown pedigrees: graduates of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, with a tradition of keeping out "street" guys like me. Despite these barriers, I believed success was possible, and despite my lack of traditional qualifications, I became one of the most accomplished stock traders in the world. I've had the privilege to advise some of the biggest institutions in America and interesting clients all around the globe, and I've even had the honor to speak at major universities and author three books, all of which were best-sellers and were translated into six languages. Today, my coaching workshops and investment seminars attract people from all over the world who want to learn my approach to winning. Best of all, I enjoy great success doing what I love.

I say this not to boast, but because my success has played a major role in how I got to be here, affording me the privilege to be in a position to do what is my ultimate purpose: to inspire others.

People often ask me, "How did you do it?" I can assure you it wasn't because of my uniqueness as a person, natural talent, or some lucky break. It was the direct result of changing my thinking and adopting a mindset that engrained in me a winning approach. I believe in this process so deeply, I've dedicated nearly two years of my life to capturing all I have learned and distilling it into this book you're holding in your hands right now.

Consider the possibility that *you* picked up this book not by accident or coincidence, but deliberately, because you're ready to give yourself permission to pursue your dreams and follow the path you always wanted to take. And if you need an example of someone who started out with less than you have right now, here I am.

If I did it, so can you.

THE TREASURE CHEST

A book is a dream you hold in your hand.

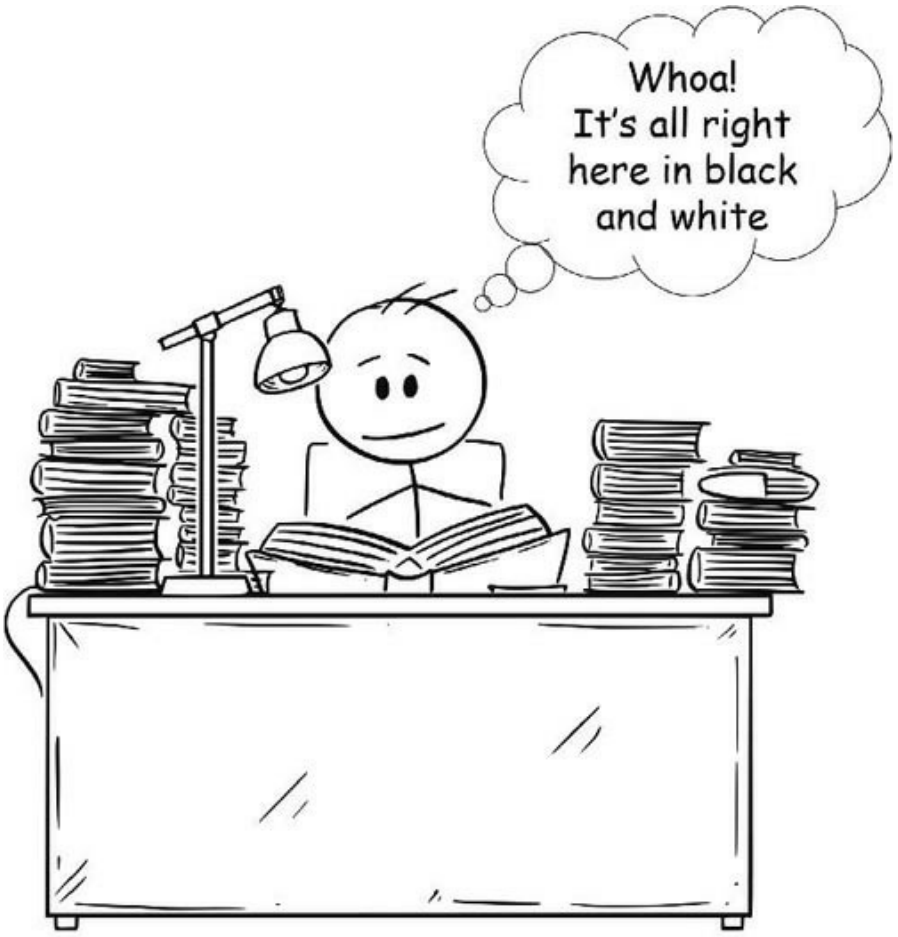
—NEIL GAIMAN

Blessings can come at the most surprising time and in the most unexpected ways. When I was eight years old, my parents divorced, and life got desperate. My mother went on welfare, and when the food stamps ran out, we barely had enough to eat. Many nights, I would hear my mother crying in her bedroom. It was hard times, and from a young age, I knew it was not the life I wanted.

My mother eventually met Dennis, a man who dreamed of success and promised her a better future. During that time, my mother was the happiest I had ever seen her. Dennis gave her hope. I must say, he was a really nice guy and everyone liked him, but he was never very successful. He sold American Automobile Association ("Triple A") memberships door-to-door. Dennis used to tell me that his job was not what he wanted to do, but he was "getting ready" for success. He went to many self-help seminars and bought all kinds of books and tapes on self-improvement, but nothing seemed to make much of a difference. Most of the time those books and cassette tapes just collected dust.

At the time, I was unemployed and broke. But I wanted to be rich—because that's what poor people dream about. One day I saw Dennis's stack of books. I randomly picked up *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill; that title seemed to say it all. In that pile were many

books on real estate investing, negotiating, and personal development. I thought to myself, "This is a stack of how-to-be-successful manuals." It was as if I had stumbled upon a treasure chest, and when I lifted the lid, a glowing golden light beamed out and the angels sang! I started reading day and night; I couldn't get enough. The more books I read and tapes I listened to, the more I became convinced that if these individuals could achieve success, I could too. I also came to suspect that belief was the essential difference between Dennis and me: He had plenty of examples to follow, but never really believed he could do it. That's why he never went from "getting ready" to actually committing and taking action.



In my naïveté, of course, I thought that I would make a million dollars right away just from reading these books, and then I'd be like the guy on the cover of the real estate course with the Rolls-Royce and the pretty girls. But I learned something far more important: There were commonalities among all the successful people in those books, a kind of "recipe" that winners followed. I was absolutely convinced that if I followed the same formula, I too could achieve the same or even better results.

THE POWER OF THE PRINTED WORD

All my life, books have inspired me. When I was too poor to afford them, I went to bookstores and stood in the aisle reading. I even went into college libraries pretending to be a student to use their reference rooms and photocopied entire books for a penny a page and then stapled the pages together. I love to learn, and I'm inspired by everything I read. I always felt, even a lousy book probably has one good idea in it. One thing I've learned through my own experience is that books change lives. It certainly has been the case in my

own life. This is my fourth book, following three previous titles on how to achieve financial success in the stock market.

All my books are very personal, part of a manifesto and legacy I want to give to my family and the world, especially my young daughter. I want her to know about empowering herself and living with purpose, so she can live a full life and have the best chance to help make a difference in the world. I'm also sharing this knowledge with you. Like the "treasure chest" of books and tapes I discovered so many years ago that changed my life trajectory, I'm confident this book can make a difference in your journey through life and help you develop your own personal power.

Now that I am in my fifties, I can look back on the trail of my life and see how I approached things and accomplished my goals against what some might call insurmountable odds. I dedicated most of my waking hours to developing a strategy, a systematic approach derived from studying winners in every field from business to Olympic champions, and applied it to everything I have ever done. My approach wasn't always as refined as it is currently, but this universal formula has worked for me time and again, whether I was fighting in competitive karate tournaments; perfecting my skills as a musician; achieving success in business, real estate, and the stock market; playing in sporting events; pursuing professional-level photography; writing books and becoming a best-selling author; conducting live seminars and doing public speaking; or, more recently, participating in competitive pistol shooting. And I'm not done yet as I pursue the fullness of becoming a "Renaissance Man."

You may think to yourself, "Wow! All these activities are so different—a broad range of professions, hobbies, and other endeavors." Yes, that's true. I've learned that with the right process, you can take on just about any new challenge and become proficient in a relatively short period—but only if you take the time to apply a winning formula and build a champion mindset.

Flash-forward 35 years from the time I discovered Dennis's books, and I am still reading books to inform and inspire me. My personal library contains thousands of titles. I've read them all, some countless times. This current book represents a synthesis of more than three decades of study, refinement, and adaptation from personal experience. The wisdom and insights have given me a great foundation and a personal strategy for achieving lasting success. My hope is that you and every other person who reads this book can discover what I now know: **Just as an acorn has an oak tree in it, there is amazing potential inside *you*. It is only a matter of developing the right mindset; then you, too, can ignite your inner winner and live the purposeful life you were meant to have.**

MY FIRST SET OF WINGS

Even though I grew up poor with many strikes against me, I was blessed to have two important influences in my life: my parents. Although my mother and my father in many ways demonstrated a lot of negative examples, they also gave me some important blessings, and those are the lessons I chose to tune into. My mother loved me tremendously, and my father always told me to "take a shot" (meaning, take a chance); he never discouraged me from pursuing my passion, including quitting school at age 15 to make a record with a band playing the drums.

One of my most cherished memories from my early childhood was my mother reading to me at bedtime from my two favorite books, *Curious George* and *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. While I have very fond memories of both, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* left an important and lasting impression. The book is a fable, written by Richard Bach, about a seagull who is tired of the daily life in the flock of just scrounging for food. Jonathan longs to

learn about life, to truly test his wings and fly. My mother gave me a copy with a note inside: "For my son on your eighth birthday. Know that you can fly as high as Jonathan did!" On my daughter's eighth birthday, I gave her the same book with the same message.

At that young age, I doubt I truly understood the metaphor, but now I appreciate the depth of this book's simple yet profound message. One quote, in particular, always stays with me. When Jonathan returns from one of his daring flights, he tells the rest of his flock what he discovered: "For a thousand years we have scrabbled after fish heads, but now we have a reason to live—to learn, to discover, to be free! Give me one chance, let me show you what I've found . . ."

This story inspired me as I grew up and now echoes my sense of purpose. Like Jonathan, I have this need to go back to "the flock" to tell the others what I discovered. I think back to the kids I grew up with, many with the same disadvantages I faced, but who never got beyond their circumstances. This book is my way of spreading the word like Jonathan Livingston Seagull, to everyone else who will listen. All of us can fly high, but it is up to us to believe in our potential. It is our choice whether to stay with the old ways that keep us "scrabbling after fish heads" or to soar beyond the heights of even our wildest imagination.

SHARING THE MUSIC

As Nobel Prize winner Erwin Schrödinger said, "If you cannot—in the long run—tell everyone what you have been doing, your doing has been worthless." In my own way I have tried to inspire others in seeing what is possible by sharing my story, my experience, and my pathway to success. And while I have come a very long way from where I started, my real work has only just begun.

The heart of this book is giving you the tools to empower yourself and learn how to use them. With self-empowerment you will be able to accomplish anything you put your mind to. Not everybody reading this book wants to be a champion stock trader or win a sporting event, and maybe achieving success in business and having more money than you need are not that important to you. But whatever you wish to accomplish, you will become empowered in its pursuit if you embrace what I'm about to share and allow this winning philosophy to transform your thinking—and, quite possibly, your life.

The music we have inside can move people, and people can move mountains. This is the music I have to give to others, rooted in my personal story: an eighth-grade dropout with just about every imaginable strike against me. I had no money, no connections, or anything other than my belief that if others were successful, I could be too. I believed in my own ability and a vision. I ventured audaciously into what was a very intimidating world to me and became a champion. More importantly, I learned one of the most valuable life lessons: **Success isn't just about what you accomplish; it's about what you do with those accomplishments, because our souls are hungry for more than just victory. Our souls are hungry for meaning.** This is what drives me to pursue even greater things—to inspire others and, I hope, to leave this life one day knowing that even one person lived a happier, more meaningful existence simply because I was here as an example. Because when you change a life, your own life changes.

All it takes is for one person to show that things can be different, that problems and obstacles are not permanent. Then the entire world can change. Once someone breaks a barrier, others believe they too can cross—that's what makes blazing a trail so important. And when someone starts with less than you have, the possibility of breaking your own barriers becomes even more convincing.

In 1997, there wasn't a single female Korean golfer on the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) Tour. Then in 1998, Se Ri Pak won two major tournaments. A new

vision emerged; suddenly, something that seemed impossible became possible. Pak inspired a generation of young women to take up golf. Today, Korean women dominate LPGA golf.

Never forget that if you weren't a very important part of this life, you wouldn't be here. And no matter how overwhelming life's challenges and problems may seem, all the greatest changes start with one person with one idea. In the words of Sir Isaac Newton, "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." And I, like you, stand on the shoulders of the trailblazers before me.

I know you can do much more than I have, because you have the benefit of my hard-earned knowledge and those who came before me. And while I know I cannot change how someone thinks, I hope to leave my own trail of clues that will lead others to think in new empowering ways. The beautiful composition known as the human race will go on, and while you are here, *you are* indeed contributing a verse. The question is, what will your verse be?

This book is part of my contribution. I'm confident it will provide an example of how to elevate your awareness and bring personal power to everything you do. With whatever you set out to accomplish, there may be physical limits, but the truth is, our psychological limits are always reached first. As a starting place, know that your capabilities are limited only by your thinking, not your circumstances. With the right mindset, you can become the champion of your own life and accomplish anything you imagine.

This is my guarantee.

PART 1

MASTERING YOUR MINDSET

CHAPTER 1

THE BELIEVING BRAIN

Champions and elite performers think differently from the average person, and they follow a different set of standards. Ultimately, this gives them their competitive advantage. It goes without saying, to become great in any field, you need to develop skills. But regardless of background or profession, highly successful individuals share a winning mindset backed by core operating beliefs, which I refer to as "global beliefs."

Think of your brain as computer software and your body as the hardware. As we know, a computer is worthless without software; the software controls the hardware. And so we might compare global beliefs with the operating system in a computer that runs all the other programs. In the same way, your belief structure is the invisible force behind all your decisions and behaviors. Your body does what your brain tells it to do within the context of what you believe. Everyone has beliefs, but not everyone lives by a set of empowering beliefs. And that's important, because your life is belief driven. Here's the secret: If you want to paint like Leonardo da Vinci, learn to think like him. **You don't become a champion boxer without first learning to think like a champion boxer any more than you can become a Buddhist monk without learning to think like a Buddhist monk.** When you know what works and what others have accomplished, and you understand the thinking behind it, you can set your sights on similar goals—even surpassing them. Inspired and empowered by winning beliefs, you can hold yourself to an even higher standard.

Bottom line: If you want to perform like a champion, you must first learn to think like one. As Deepak Chopra put it: "To change the printout of the body, you must learn to rewrite the software of the mind." It's not enough to just emulate the physical aspects of a successful individual or even possess similar knowledge and skill; it's your mindset that determines what you do with those qualities. In this chapter and throughout this book, we will explore some powerful beliefs and strategies that support peak performance and winning. Not just winning a race or some contest but winning in life—to wake up with passion and purpose and to live the life you've imagined.

THE SOURCE AND THE MESSAGE

Have you ever wondered why you believe what you believe or where those beliefs came from? Certainly you didn't wake up one day and there they were. Do you ever question or doubt them? Do your current beliefs propel you toward greatness and enable you do *amazing things*, or do they hold you back? The real question is, do they serve you, or do you serve them? Who's really running the show?

From the moment we are born, we are constantly being bombarded with information from a myriad of sources. What we believe is often heavily influenced, if not shaped, by the people in our world, especially those closest to us—those we love, trust, and respect the most. Both our conscious and our unconscious minds are continually absorbing, interpreting,

filtering, and processing incoming data. Much of what we absorb in a typical day happens without our conscious awareness. From the time we were infants, our parents, our siblings, our friends, our teachers, our heroes, the TV we watch, the music we listen to, the books we read, the places of worship we attend, and even the websites we frequent have been influencing us to think, behave, and believe a certain way.

Outside sources can influence what we believe, and personal experience can strengthen our beliefs by giving them credibility. When we have multiple experiences that are in line with what we believe, we become increasingly convinced. Or it could be that we had one very strong emotional experience that moved us deeply and created some deep emotional attachments. The more a belief is reinforced, the further it is driven into our nervous system and a very strong attachment is forged. For example, if you grew up in an environment in which education and academic excellence were paramount, there's a fair chance you'll demand that your kids finish school and go to college. And if you attended college yourself and it resulted in your getting a degree and a high-paying job, it's even more likely that you would stress the importance of education, because you have reinforced that belief with evidence and personal experience.

But it's also true that many of our childhood fears have become our adult beliefs. They are the invisible force influencing everything we do. Most of our engrained beliefs are "hand-me-downs" passed on for generations. Until we reach a point where we start deciding for ourselves what to believe, we are operating from a preprogrammed set of inputs that unconsciously influence the choices we make.

Look at your current circumstances, your relationships, your finances, your level of happiness, your passion and fulfillment, and your physical health. Now consider what

these circumstances reveal about you. What are the results of your life telling you about what you believe? Acknowledge your role in all this, and contemplate that you have gotten to where you are currently as a result of acting on what you believed. Self-improvement starts with self-discovery. Becoming the person that you want to become requires believing what a person like that would believe. If you have made some poor decisions, consider this: If what you believed created your current circumstances, then what you choose to believe going forward can create your future!

THE GRAVITY OF BELIEF

On one level, beliefs can provide a moral framework, set positive preferences, and steer you in the direction toward success. But there's a potentially negative side, too, where a belief can manifest as prejudice and even compel someone to do the unthinkable. One thing for sure, beliefs are a powerful force.

Humans have a wide range of beliefs, and when we believe strongly in something, we will usually *disbelieve* anything that contradicts it. This can result in our having a primary belief system and many disbelief systems. For example, if people believe in one religion and accept all the tenets of that faith, they are likely to disbelieve in other religions, rejecting outright the ideas that others hold to be absolute truths. Conversely, if we agree with someone's beliefs, we're more likely to be friends with that person, as we tend to like people who think like us. We are also likely to spend more time reading stories that align with our opinions and beliefs. While this makes sense, it means that we subconsciously ignore and tend to dismiss anything that threatens our world views, since we surround ourselves with people and information that confirm what we already think. This is called "confirmation bias." Henry David Thoreau said, "A man receives only what he is ready to receive, whether physically, intellectually or morally." In simple terms, it means we proactively seek out evidence that confirms our existing beliefs.

In an experiment at the University of Minnesota, participants read a story about a woman called Jane who acted extroverted in some situations and introverted in others. When the participants returned a few days later, they were divided into two groups. One group was asked if Jane would be suited to a job as a librarian; the other group was asked about her having a job as a real estate agent. The librarian group remembered Jane as being introverted and later said that she would not be suited to a real estate job. The real estate group did exactly the opposite: The members of that group remembered Jane as being extroverted and said she would be suited to a real estate job, and when they were later asked if she would make a good librarian, they said no.

In your own life, you tend to experience what you believe. It's a fact that we are partial to what we hold as truth. We search for information that confirms our beliefs and give more weight to that information and less weight to evidence that contradicts what we believe. We also tend to interpret data in a way that confirms our beliefs, and we are more likely to remember facts that support our beliefs and forget facts that contradict them. This is why our beliefs are so incredibly important: Our reality is shaped by what we believe.

What do you really believe? Whatever it may be, if you believe strongly enough, think about it regularly, and make it the focus of your daily conversations, you will see a great amount of it in your life. All the principles in this book start with that premise.

CONGRUENCY OR CONFLICT

I want to be clear: A belief is not necessarily right or wrong; it's just a belief—a strong

conviction you have about something. But each of us has certain core beliefs that govern how we view ourselves and perceive the world around us. You probably have some really great beliefs, but it's the limiting beliefs that will hold you back from reaching your potential.

Our beliefs shape our mental representations—what things mean to us. They are our foundation. And just like a house is only as good as its foundational structure, global beliefs determine the sturdiness of all our thoughts.

A global belief is a strong universal force because there's generally a large emotional investment involved. It applies to virtually everything we do and even shapes other beliefs we have. In contrast, isolated beliefs are narrow and transient; they are what we think or believe about a particular situation. Here's an example:

Jim physically abuses his wife; therefore, I believe:

1. Jim is a bad person.
2. Any man that physically abuses his wife is a bad person.
3. All men are bad people.
4. People in general are inherently bad.

As you can see, the more I broaden the scope and range of the belief, the more "global" the belief becomes and the more implications it holds. As a result, it is far more likely to affect other beliefs about Jim and how he's viewed—and maybe even men in general or the human race! That's because global beliefs set our world view and can empower us or impose severe limitations. But our actions are not always congruent with those beliefs. **When we think one way but act another, we set off an internal conflict that leads to self-sabotage. In the long run, the global belief always wins because we are swimming against the tide of our own belief system.**

If we believe something strongly enough, it eventually becomes part of our identity, and rarely do we go against the perception of who we think we are. For example, we make more money but end up broke. We find a new love but end up fighting over the same things. If our identity is of someone who is inadequate or undeserving, it doesn't matter what appears in our life; our belief system will dictate our course of action.

Consider this: You have the opportunity to earn $10 million, but you must murder someone. Even if you knew there was no chance you would get caught, would you do it? Those who say no do not turn it down because they do not want the $10 million. Instead, it is because the required action conflicts with their values and belief structure. They cannot undermine their core operating system. This conflict is rooted in the psychological principle called “cognitive dissonance,” which is defined as the uncomfortable psychological state that arises when your beliefs contradict your actions. In the same way, your beliefs define what you will and will not do. Therefore, it’s not your capability that determines your behavior, but how you view yourself.

In real life, we do not usually face such extreme choices. But we do find ourselves in situations every day in which we have the choice—the free will—to act in accordance with our beliefs. When we go against them, we self-destruct. When we align our thinking and our actions with supportive beliefs, though, we become empowered!

MIND TO MATTER

We are masters of our own perceptions. As the Dalai Lama said, “If you want to know what will happen to you in the future, look at what your mind is doing now.” In that freedom is the personal power to choose and create our own reality. As you learn to think like a winner and believe what a winner believes, you will start acting like a winner, and you will start winning! Why? Because your brain will create the hardwiring of a winner.

We used to think that after childhood, the brain could not change very much. It was believed that after puberty, the only changes in the brain were degenerative. As it turns out,

nothing could be further from the truth. Thanks to advances in technology, we now know that through chemical signals between brain cells and neurons, the brain can alter its physical structure over time. This is a phenomenon called "neuroplasticity." Our brains have the ability to change themselves, their structures, and their neuropathways, and they even have the ability to grow new cells. Your brain can change! You have the ability to increase your intelligence, learn new skills, and become whoever you want to be. During such changes, the brain engages in synaptic pruning, deleting the neural connections that are no longer necessary or useful and strengthening the necessary ones.

For example, it has been discovered that those who read braille have a larger hand sensory area in their brains than those who don't. It's not a genetic trait; it's a learned skill that leads to a biological change in the brain. In his book *Becoming Supernatural,* Dr. Joe Dispenza explains it like this:

When you think of something, a biochemical reaction begins in your brain, causing the brain to release certain chemical signals; your thoughts literally become matter. These signals or messengers make your body feel exactly the way you were just thinking. Once you become aware of how you are feeling, you then generate more thoughts closely related to those feelings, and then you release more chemicals from your brain to make you feel more of the same.

IT'S ALL ABOUT MEANING

We are the only creatures that can think a thought and become angry, sad, or blissful. We alone can decide what something means to us—whether blue is a favorite color, or we prefer mayonnaise over mustard. Do you realize what that suggests?

Nothing in life has any meaning except the meaning we give it. We create our experiences! This doesn't just happen all by itself. It happens when we exercise the most powerful of all human abilities, the freedom to choose. Behind every action are the brushstrokes of thought painting pictures in your mind's eye. As you act on those thoughts, you embed the images into your subconscious, and you begin to associate them with your identity—who you are. The images, then, become your reality. Dispenza used the example of having a fearful thought; soon you start to feel fear. That leads you to think more fearful thoughts, until you're caught in a loop where your thinking creates feelings and your feelings create thinking. "When you fire these same circuits in your brain over and over again, you are hardwiring your brain into the same patterns. As a result, your brain becomes an artifact of your past thinking, and in time you begin to automatically think in the same ways and create the same images in your mind."

Most people, though, are unaware of the auto-neurotic loop they get caught up in. As a result, few take full advantage of their ability to circumvent negative or disrupting emotions. Instead, they become emotionally charged and put labels on these feelings. They relinquish their own responsibility by assigning blame: "This traffic jam is stressing me out"; "She made me angry"; "You're putting too much pressure on me". **There is no stress in the world, just stressful thinking. There is no fear, just fearful thoughts. We are the creator of those feelings. We alone decide what our personal experiences means to us.** Feelings do not just appear out of thin air; they are internally generated. All that is "out there" is raw, unformed data waiting to be interpreted by you, the perceiver.

William Shakespeare wrote, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Central to this concept is understanding that, no matter what is said or done, nobody can make you feel a certain way. You may not like what someone says; you consider it to be an insult or a putdown. But no one, and I mean *no one*, can make you feel anything. That power

doesn't belong to anyone but you. Likewise, we have no control over what others say or do—maybe you wish that wasn't true, but there is great freedom in that truth. Since we cannot control others, they have no power to control us, either.

Peace Pilgrim (born Mildred Lisette Norman), an American spiritual teacher, pacifist, and peace activist, was jailed for vagrancy during her 25,000-mile walk for world peace. After her release, an officer remarked, "You don't seem to be any worse than before your day in jail." To that she replied, "It's only the body you can put behind bars. I never felt in prison and neither will you—unless you imprison yourself."

Events Do Not Drive Us, Thoughts Do

Life's steering wheel is thought. We all have the ability to focus our mind and, therefore, steer our lives by choosing the meaning we assign to everything we experience. Think about this: There is no happiness, confidence, or misery in the world. All these are emotions and meanings we project onto a situation. Don't believe me? Look in your pockets or purse for confidence. Maybe you found a few bucks, but you didn't find confidence.

It's not what happens to us that creates our feelings; it's what we believe about what happens to us—the meaning we assign to an event. This is very important to understand, because while you cannot change what occurred in the past, you can choose what it represents or means to you. Humans select a narrow set of facts and, based on what they perceive, establish a narrative of what happened and assign meaning to it. Our sense of self and self-worth are tied up in the story behind what we have experienced. But just as with all feelings from the past, that story is purely imaginative, which means we can control our perception of it.

Think of your past events like a light fixture and your thoughts about them a light bulb. If you don't like the type of light being produced—too harsh, too dim—you can change the light bulb. The fixture (event) stays the same, but the light bulb (meaning) gets replaced.

This is the secret to happiness: Nothing has any power to make you feel a certain way other than the power you give it by the meaning you assign to it. You determine how you experience everything that happens in your life, and that includes the way you currently experience things from the past. The point is not to replace "official" facts with different ones. It's replacing or revising the meaning of the facts. **When we are willing to see that our past isn't set in stone as if it's fossilized, we can revise the meaning behind unwanted experiences and free ourselves from the chains of our personal history.** We can modify our representations of the past and transform the meaning in our minds from a crippling memory to a liberating truth.

Most of our life experiences are lost to memory. We consider ourselves happy if we remember a good story rather than the specific experiences themselves. That's how we change the past—in the story we tell ourselves. While we cannot change the facts of what happened, we can assign a different weight and revise the representations that generate the meaning of those events in the present. What really happened is not as important as the meaning we assign now to "what happened" back then. Sometimes when we look at our past from a different angle, we can transform clutter and confusion to clarity and understanding or anger and pain to empathy and compassion. For example, if you don't agree with how you were treated or raised as a child, maybe that thought has led you to question how much your parents really loved you. But what if you opened yourself up to the idea that they did the best they knew how based on their own conditioned beliefs. Would that change your perspective?

Try repeating this statement several times a day for the next week: "Nothing has meaning except for the meaning I give it."

Those words will remind you that life is really a canvas, and you get to choose what you

put on that canvas to give it meaning. **There isn't a right or wrong answer for the meaning of what happens in life. We choose what things mean to us and label them as good or bad, moral or immoral, stressful or delightful, and that determines how we experience them.** What one person perceives as a failure another sees as valuable feedback and an opportunity to learn and improve. That doesn't just happen; it's a result of the meaning you assign to everything that happens in your life, and it's the fundamental key to happiness and success.

CHALLENGING—AND CHANGING—YOUR BELIEFS

When we were children, many of us believed in Santa Claus. I did, but not because I was born with that belief. I was told he existed, and little packages showed up at Christmas that contained things that made me happy. What did I know? I figured it must be true. Then I witnessed my mother wrapping presents in the middle of the night, and later on I stumbled upon those presents in her closet just before Christmas. Suddenly, my belief was challenged, and I was uncertain. Motivated by suspicion, I put a little mark on one of the presents with a red pen. When that same package showed up under the tree on Christmas morning, I got confirmation and logically understood what was going on—Mom was Santa! That new belief got further reinforced when I told my friend what had happened, and he said he had also seen his mother putting presents under his tree. Then kids at school that told me Santa didn't exist!

Some people choose to stay stuck in childhood beliefs forever. And some choose to keep believing what others tell them they should believe, even though their line of thinking fails to deliver meaningful results. Beliefs can be conditioned and even manipulated by others. But you can choose your own beliefs and condition yourself to go in the direction *you* want to go, to become the person *you* want to be. We all have an amazing capacity to learn and choose, but most of our learning happens unconsciously and unintentionally because we fail to monitor and regulate what we feed our mind and question our beliefs.

What keeps most people from realizing their true potential or higher self is their limiting beliefs, which form the lens through which they see the world. Most of our personality was shaped early on by fear of embarrassment, fear of losing face, fear of appearing uncool. **If you cling to your old fearful beliefs, you will never be able to courageously create the life you dream of. Instead, you will remain a frightened child in a grown-up world.** Even if we have experienced success, much of the thinking that has gotten us to where we are currently will not necessarily get us to where we want to go. A new way of thinking is always a necessary part of personal growth.

During my youth, I grew up in a very dysfunctional environment surrounded by negative examples. To become a success and live a better life, many of the beliefs that were engrained in me as a child had to be recalibrated. There are three steps to recalibrating a belief:

1. **Challenge and destabilize your old belief.** Ask yourself, "How is my current belief holding me back and lin me?"
2. **Introduce a new replacement belief.** Ask yourself, "What new belief could I adopt that would empower me amazing things—a belief that would be in direct conflict with my limiting belief?"
3. **Reinforce the new belief repeatedly.** Ask yourself, "How can I validate and fortify this new belief?"

BREAKING THE ADDICTION

When we believe something about ourselves, we are more likely to act in ways that correspond to our beliefs, thus reinforcing those beliefs and encouraging the same behavior. Similarly, when we believe something about others, we act in ways that encourage them to

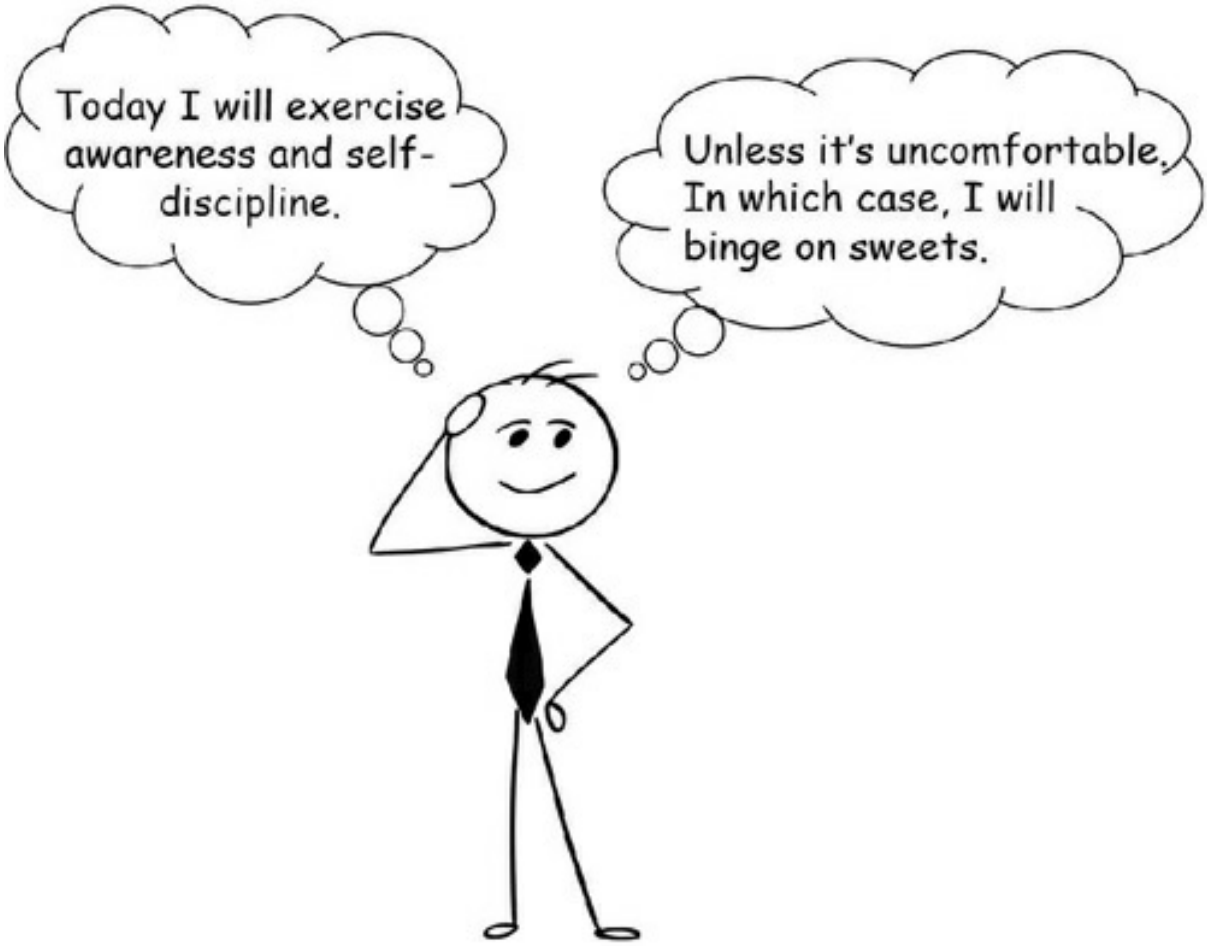
confirm our assumptions, thus reinforcing our beliefs about them. Research bears this out.

So what's standing in the way of you changing your beliefs right now?

For most of us, it's our addiction to our own problems. To feed our survival-based emotions, we keep negative stimuli around us so that we can produce stress response. When triggered, that response creates chemicals in our bodies that give us a powerful rush of energy. That rush comes from our problems, and our problems reinforce our identity, or who we believe we are. As a result, we unconsciously become addicted to our misery! **We condition ourselves to live with the fear that if the snags, glitches, and dysfunction of our daily grind were to disappear, we wouldn't know what to do or how to feel. We wouldn't be reminded of who we are.** This is a learned disorder that keeps us focused on our neurotic tendencies, and it distracts us from our authentic intention.

All of us have certain nervous habits. Fear and anxiety trigger certain routine behaviors I call "auto-neurotic responses." We're like Pavlov's dog, responding to a stimulus without consciously thinking. We chronically complain and gravitate to discussions about our problems because we have a sense of familiarity and comfort with what we can identify with. As the saying goes, "Misery loves company." Some people unconsciously seek conflict as a way to stimulate their brains with a rush of energy. They don't plan on doing it or even realize they're doing it. And yet, they constantly try to "turn on" their brains by causing turmoil. This is something you notice with couples that bicker and argue all the time. It's the need for stimulation that keeps them coming back to their neurotic ways. The emotional turmoil generated by conflict produces stress chemicals that keep the brain active.

Negative emotions set off preprogrammed reactions that are supposed to be soothing, but they really don't solve anything. In fact, they can range from counterproductive to very unhealthy. And the real issue is, we become addicted to them, and over time they become part of our identity and the role we act out in life. Whether you like the role or not, it may be the only role you comfortably know how to play, and that's why you keep coming back to it.



It doesn't have to be this way. You are not doomed by your genes and hardwired to be a certain way for the rest of your life. Even your habits are not engrained to the point of becoming destiny; you can reverse your neurotic dependence. Just as you have become addicted to your problems, you can replace those unhealthy ways and draw positive energy from love, passion, joy, gratitude, and inspiration. It all begins with deciding on the person you are going to be and believing what a person like that would believe. **Change begins with mentally rehearsing a new way of being and replacing your limiting beliefs with new empowering beliefs. It starts with allowing yourself to mentally actualize.** Ask yourself, "What would my perfect day look like?" Live through that day in your mind, experiencing everything in vivid detail. Allow yourself to live in a new future, to the extent that your subconscious can really "experience" it in the present moment.

It may be challenging at first, as you consciously try to become aware of your tendencies and think outside how you currently feel, especially if your mental patterns have been governed by negative emotions. Even though the intellectual conscious mind wants joy and understands the problem, the unconscious has been programmed to feel otherwise. However painful or traumatic our past, we want to remember and relive it because it reminds us of who we are and where we come from. If you have been devoted to the feelings that come from the problems and dysfunctions of your past, you have created an auto-neurotic state of being.

But when we decide to manage our mind and communicate the proper messaging, we can literally rewrite our internal code. This is a learned habit I call "auto-actualizing." With thought, we can signal the body emotionally and begin to alter a chain of genetic events without first having any actual physical experience. We don't need to win a race, or win the lottery, or get that big promotion before we experience the positive emotions associated with

those events. We can create an emotion by thought alone. We can experience joy and gratitude in our minds to the extent that the body begins to believe that it is already in that event; then the mind moves the body in that direction automatically.

YOU WRITE THE SONG THAT MAKES YOUR WHOLE WORLD SING

Breaking your mental addictions starts with monitoring your internal and external dialogue. You are the writer and the narrator of the story you keep telling yourself. What you think, what you say, and how you behave will dictate everything you experience and attract in your life. This is what reveals you—are you paying attention?

The quality of your life is based on the quality of the meaning you assign to life's events and how you communicate with yourself. Because if you keep hearing the same message backed by the same behavior, eventually you believe it. The purpose of becoming self-aware is so that you no longer allow unwanted thoughts and emotions to pass by undetected. Ask yourself, "What thoughts, conversations, and behaviors am I living each day?"

If you want to shape your destiny, you must first dictate your life's narrative. By assuming control of how you think and communicate, you are rewriting your personal truth and rewiring your brain. **When we change our thoughts, emotions, and expressions, we send ourselves new signals, and they express new proteins and activate our cells in a new way. Our psychology becomes our biology.**

The way you communicate with yourself and others strengthens the song that keeps playing in your head, and that song becomes the anthem of your identity. Your goal is to produce a new melody with a new message that represents the new you. When you introduce and reinforce a new set of beliefs that conflict with your old way of thinking, you dismantle the old you. By creating and living in a mental image of where you want to be, as if you are already there, your mind will move to close the gap between the two. In doing so, your awareness expands, and you begin to see the opportunities that support the realization of your vision. As you repeat this frame of mind every day, over time it will become more routine and natural. Eventually, it will be unconscious and automatic.

How does this work?

To the subconscious, what you imagine is real. When you focus on something—the vacation you're going to take, the business you want to start, the person you want to become—that focus instantly creates ideas and thought patterns you wouldn't have had otherwise. Even your physiology will respond to an image in your head as if it were reality.

If you go to this place in your mind 10 or 20 times per day, it's just as if you really went there, and those images get imprinted in your subconscious. The images you imprint in your mind become your new addiction. The problem is, most of us don't mentally visit that new future often enough or vividly enough, so it never gets a chance to imprint and replace our old ways. But when you do, you create positive incongruency—a gap that your mind will look for ways to fill. If you are poor and constantly see yourself doing the things you need to do to live abundantly, your mind will start to auto-direct your attention. The prospects that you failed to see (opportunities that were there all along) will start to come into focus. Then it's up to you to reinforce those images with congruent behaviors and create new habits.

To quote Thoreau: "To carve a physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives." Make no mistake, you still have to take action; nothing appears with little or no effort. But the mind must be convinced, so the body can act with conviction. We accomplish this by living our dream in the present tense and by mentally closing the gap between where we are

and where we want to be.

For example, the year I competed in the U.S. Investing Championship, every morning I woke up, looked in the mirror, and said to myself, "Good morning, 1997 U.S. Investing Champion." I knew in my mind with absolute certainty that I was already the winner of the championship. Whenever people asked me how I was doing in the contest, I told them I had already won. They assumed the contest was over, but it wasn't, except in my own mind. That level of mental certainty propelled me to a national title.

During a live interview in 2019, Golden State Warriors power forward Draymond Green explained, "You don't just mistakenly become great at something." He said:

> *As a competitor, if you don't have the mindset that you're the best ever, you failed already. And that has been my mindset as long as I can remember. And every day I step onto the basketball floor, I will strive to be that. But my mindset will always be as such, as that I am the best to do what I do. And that will give me a shot at being the best.*

Once you decide that you already *are* a successful person (not that you are going to be), you can start living each day with that intention. You are already "there" mentally, which must come first, before it can happen physically. **You become a winner the instant you decide to start living like a winner; then winning competitions and winning in life become possible. But first you must bridge the gap between where you are and where you want to be by living in your new identity.**

Everything we need to succeed and to achieve our dreams is already available to us. It's just a matter of becoming congruent with our better self. But few of us ever get the chance, because we have connected "congruency" with the comfort of our problems and neurotic dysfunctions.

Be the Change

Your personality is made up of how you think, feel, and act, not the other way around. Monitoring your daily thoughts and conversations (with others and with yourself) will reveal your mental addictions and neurotic ways. If you've conditioned yourself in past experiences and made negative thinking a habit—you can change that. Start by tracking your thoughts. You will notice that you spend most of your time either thinking ahead or looking back with worry or regret. Until you can be "there" for real, you need to be there mentally. But to create a new self, you need to go beyond just positive thinking to positive living.

Those who feel stuck inside an unwanted personality become so hypnotized by who they think they are, they fail to realize who they can be. **Find the best part of you, and treat yourself as if you are only that. Nurture your finest qualities, and they will grow. In the presence of your best self, your lesser self will perish.** But only you can do this. If you are not committed to who you are, who else will be? The first step of that commitment is choosing what you bring into your mind's eye and how you act upon those thoughts—what you communicate to yourself and to others. It's the combination of our beliefs, our thoughts, and our actions that creates true personal power. One without the others will do you no good. Ultimately, you are not defined by just what's inside your head; you are defined by what you do, your actions, and those actions must be in line with your beliefs; otherwise the change will only be temporary.

Who we choose to be "sentences" us to the lives we get. Choose to think and act like a champion, and you will start to feel deserving of champion results. Then becoming a champion becomes a real possibility. Sentence yourself to the life you truly want by acknowledging your authentic intention, demonstrating your best qualities, and focusing your

mind on where you want to go, as if you are already there. Live in that new space now! Then your subconscious will create the conditions to take you there and beyond.

YOU CAN THANK YOUR RETICULAR ACTIVATION SYSTEM

We can attract more of what we want simply by deciding where we focus our attention. For that amazing truth, you can thank the reticular activating system. If you Google that, you'll find something like this (taken from the website Science Direct): "The reticular activating system (RAS) is a network of neurons located in the brain stem that pro-ject anteriorly to the hypothalamus to mediate behavior, as well as both posteriorly to the thalamus and directly to the cortex for activation of awake, desynchronized cortical EEG patterns." Let me simplify:

The RAS is a bundle of nerves at our brain stem that filters out unnecessary information so the important stuff gets through (see Figure 1.1). The RAS is the reason you buy a new car in a certain color, then suddenly you start seeing that exact same car everywhere. Recently, I bought a burnt orange pickup truck. At the time, I thought the color was unique. Just a few days after I purchased the vehicle, I started seeing the same make, model, and color everywhere. What happened? Did the dealership get a huge shipment of burnt orange pickup trucks just like mine and start selling them at a discount? No. It was my RAS at work. There wasn't a great influx of burnt orange pickup trucks; I was just hyperaware of them.

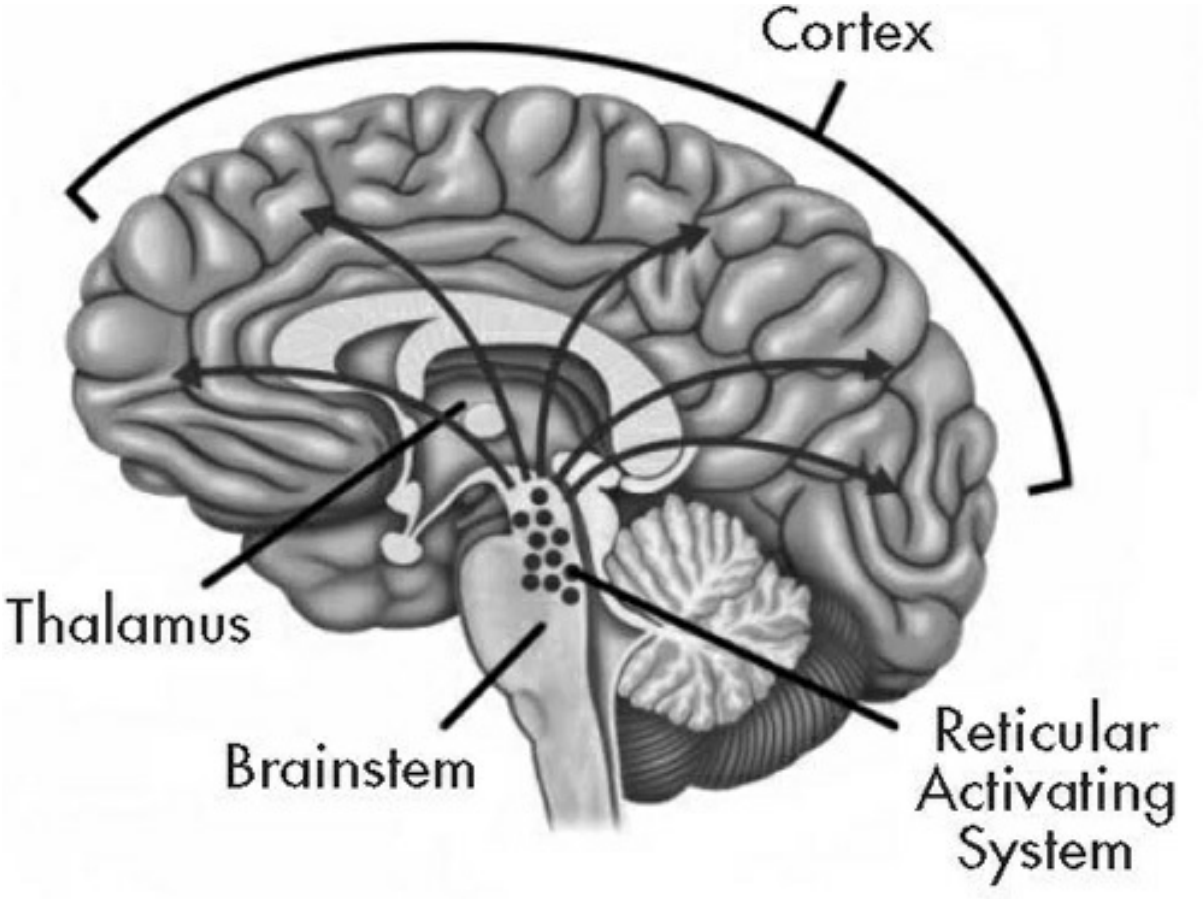


FIGURE 1-1 The reticular activating system is a cone-shaped complex of nerves radiating from the brain stem. The nerve fibers of the RAS filter incoming sensory data and determine whether the data are to be part of the information that is permitted into our consciousness. The RAS is one of the brain's most important action systems because it literally functions as the "doorkeeper" to our consciousness.

The RAS is the same reason why you can be in a noisy crowd of people, yet immediately snap to attention when someone says your name. Your RAS tunes out irrelevant "noise." It then sifts through the data and presents only the pieces that are important to you. It seeks information that validates your beliefs and filters the world through the parameters you give it. And all of this happens without you noticing.

If you didn't have a RAS, you'd go crazy with distraction. Every sight, sound, and image around you—in your body, in your environment, in the house, and on the street—would be amplified, and you would become overwhelmed because you'd be aware of it all at once. You'd quickly melt down into information overload. The RAS keeps that from happening. For example, if you live next to a railroad track, your RAS has been conditioned not to regard the rumbling sounds as unusual while you are asleep. Someone whose RAS has not been trained in this manner would immediately awaken because of the thundering clatter. Through intention, you can train your RAS by melding your conscious to your subconscious thoughts. By focusing on your intention, your RAS will reveal the people, information, and opportunities that help you achieve them. For example, if you really want to lose 30 pounds and set your intent on accomplishing that goal, the more you focus your mind on that intention, the more you'll tune in to the information that helps you do that.

With even a basic understanding of the RAS, you can see how important it is to be conscious of what you focus on. If you dwell on all the bad things that happened in the past, you'll create a future that looks the same. Why? Because you'll naturally gravitate toward re-creating those familiar images. **Your desires send messages into the field of your consciousness, and that field is connected to all the other fields of energy. Your thoughts are rippling across the universe, and they have the organizational power to bring fulfillment to any intention.** People often refer to this phenomenon as the "law of attraction." But it's not magic; things are not going to appear out of nowhere. There is good science behind the RAS and the images it selects. When you consciously shift or expand your focus to something, you can guide your RAS to concentrate more on those images. It's like the guidance system for a rocket: You're going to hit the target if you program the right course.

"GARDENING" YOUR MIND

A garden will only yield what gets planted, and that all starts with seeds. It's the same with your mind, and your thoughts are the seeds. Whether your garden is lush and magnificent or choked with damaging weeds, it reflects what was planted. Those seeds (ideas) determine the composition of your garden (brain). So what has your garden yielded? The answer completely depends on what you have planted or allowed others to plant.

The key here is to control what you allow in your garden—how you feed your mind and where you focus your thoughts. That starts with choosing empowering beliefs and consciously reinforcing those beliefs. Surround yourself with like-minded people, read empowering books, listen to supportive audio programs, attend amazing seminars, and immerse yourself in an environment that counteracts your old limiting beliefs. Live your life aligned with your authentic intention by focusing your thoughts and your words in new empowering ways. Do these things, because you can't afford to allow poison to enter your sacred garden and produce a neurotic reality.

You probably have your own hoard of negative beliefs and disempowering images, collected over time. You'll have to root them out and replace them, too (like weeding the garden of your mind). It will take persistence and effort, because many of your limiting beliefs have been anchored in your nervous system, some of them from the time you were 10

years old or even younger.

Most of us were probably told as children that if we touched the stove when it was hot, we would burn our hand. If you did, you felt immense pain; then—voilà!—a suggestion became an anchored belief. When we believe something, we search for ways to prove it's true and fortify it. If you were told that you were not clever enough or not good enough at a subject or at a sport, the danger would be if you believed it to be true.

But your brain is amazing, and it has the capability to change your life regardless of what stage you are at. It's all a matter of how you choose to reprogram it. If you give your mind the chance to create the life you really want, it will amaze you and give you even more than you imagined. It starts by feeding it healthy thoughts, choosing empowering beliefs, and acting in accordance with a new set of higher standards. Then your RAS can start to work for you, not against you, and point you in a direction of opportunity and success.

LIVE IT NOW

Think about some of the engrained beliefs you have and how your preconceived notions lock you into a safe, familiar box and prevent you from courageously going after the life you really want. Where did those limiting beliefs come from? Did you choose them? More importantly, are they the kind of beliefs that represent who you truly want to be? **If you are not living the life you imagined, it's because someone or something convinced you that you weren't smart enough or talented enough and you believed it.** You allowed the negative side of life to validate the idea that you are unworthy.

Try this: Instead of questioning why something is upsetting you or making you feel less capable, question your perception of the event or circumstance. Start by asking questions about how you can respond.

When life knocks you down and you get back up and try again, only to get knocked down again, you think to yourself: "Why me? When I've done everything right and still everything turns out wrong!" A better question to ask is: "What empowering beliefs can I adopt right now—new beliefs that can counteract the way I've been thinking?" This is crucial, because I assure you that the circumstances of your life are a by-product of the underlying invisible force that influences everything you do—your beliefs. And *you* have the ability to change them.

Each day we step onto a stage, playing the part for which we were literally made. The spotlight shines on us directly as our audience waits to hear the words and the melody we were born to sing. It's our show and we alone have the power to make it magical. Our dreams and desires are not something we go out and find and take in. They're nature telling us what's inside trying to get out! When your beliefs are calibrated with your intention, your true potential can naturally emerge. Examine what you believe and how those beliefs may be holding you back from living a magical life. Then commit to the process of recalibrating your belief system, challenging and changing your limiting beliefs to empowering convictions.

When you believe in a future that is so alive in your mind that you keep living it over and over, your mind "front runs" your environment and pulls you in that direction. The birth of greatness occurs when one holds a vision and a dream independent of the current environment. Greatness always starts this way; by thinking greater than your present reality. But change will not occur until you get into your mental operating system and change some settings.

We want to succeed and achieve great things, but when we fail to live like a winner by thinking winning thoughts, we have little chance of succeeding on a big scale. Thinking like a winner and believing what a winner believes comes before winning!

It was by conscious thought that your current beliefs were formed, and it is through conscious thought that they will be changed. While we are capable of reliving a past event over and over—perhaps thousands of times—we are just as capable of living forward and assigning empowering meaning to everything we experience and believe.

Over the years, I've discovered that there are some key beliefs that are supportive of building a winning mindset—principles that virtually all champions share. In the next chapter, I'm going to share them with you so you can start envisioning—and experiencing—the life you've always wanted.

So let's get started.

CHAPTER 2

THE SEVEN NOBLE TRUTHS OF A WINNER

You are not born a plumber, an electrician, a doctor, or a lawyer, any more than you are born a car salesperson or an Olympic athlete. You are born a human with a brain. And as you discover free will, you decide to pursue certain endeavors as you become the person you choose to be. As William Jennings Bryan said, "Destiny is not a matter of chance, but a matter of choice." This was perhaps the single biggest shift in my own thinking that made an enormous difference in my life. To know that within you is the power to create your own future and shape your destiny.

All of us have talents and far more potential than we might ever presume, but not all of us know how to discover our talents and fulfill our dreams. Our potential has always existed and will be there whether we realize it or not. Like a small, unassuming acorn lying on the forest floor, given the right conditions, it will emerge into a mighty oak tree. In the same way, to grow into the vision of what you want to become, *you* must create fertile conditions by *choosing* beliefs that empower you. The first step is to activate the beliefs that guide you toward the outcomes you want—beliefs that get you to where you want to go.

As I said earlier, a belief is not necessarily right or wrong; it's just a belief. Some people choose limiting beliefs and accept the disempowering views that were handed down to them. Winners choose empowering truths that inspire the will to succeed. In order to accomplish great things and create lasting success, you need to tap into the beliefs that empower you the most.

In this chapter, I share with you the Seven Noble Truths of a Winner, the key pillars of champion thinking. These are not the only empowering beliefs you can adopt, but they are the core beliefs that made the most difference in my life.

TRUTH #1
WINNING IS A CHOICE

Yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or lose.

—LYNDON B. JOHNSON

In sports, business, and every other aspect of life, we choose to win, and we choose to lose. That's right! We win when we decide that we're going to be winners. And if you don't know how, then you've chosen not to seek the available resources to learn.

Champions understand that hope is not a strategy. The best performers never trust greatness to chance. Instead, they actively create the conditions that allow them to be at their personal best. They decide to be winners, and they live each day with that goal in mind, because they recognize that when conditions are right, nature always fulfills its promise.

Winning or losing is self-created, but only winners are able to admit that. In the mind of a champion, there is no doubt that winning is a conscious choice!

Do you believe the above statement to be true? If you don't, then, by default, you accept that you have no control over your life. Or maybe you accept it partially but still believe luck plays a role. Well, if that's true, then what's the point of really trying to succeed at anything—just to see if you get lucky?

If you don't believe that you are creating your world, then you're at the mercy of circumstances. From time to time, you can be lucky or unlucky. Sure, you can play the lottery and get the "lucky numbers." But over a lifetime, luck and fate have little to do with your development as someone who consistently comes out on top.

The belief that winning is a choice applies to more than just a one-time event. It applies to your entire life! Any given set of circumstances can be used to create something positive or negative, depending on how you perceive the world and the choices you make. But it's up to you to create the right conditions. **Our greatest personal power is the ability to direct our mind and choose. Real empowerment comes when we realize that every action, reaction, and emotion—happiness, sadness, anger, and love—are all choices.** If you want to be the best you can be, you must learn to *think* the best you can think. Being at the right place at the right time helps, but even then you must be prepared and ready for that moment. If you attribute success to luck or fate, you are sunk. It is tantamount to saying everything you want to achieve is controlled by something outside your own control—it's just chance.

Humans are not just amoebas, merely existing. We have brains, consciousness, imagination, and free will—gifts meant to be used, not squandered. Every state and mood imaginable can be generated at will in our minds. That means we can choose our own greatness! Everyone has that capability. But first you must acknowledge that seeking and achieving excellence in every part of your life is a conscious choice.

Sure, some people have certain genetic advantages. Maybe a person has a specific muscular build, such as Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps, the most decorated athlete in Olympic history with 23 gold medals. His genetic advantage is having exceptionally long arms compared with his shorter legs, which gives him a proportionally broader "wingspan" measuring 80 inches tip to tip.

Then consider surfer Bethany Hamilton. At age 13, she was attacked by a shark, which resulted in her losing her left arm all the way up to her shoulder. But Bethany was back on her surfboard one month later, and two years after that, she won first place in the Explorer Women's Division of the NSSA National Championships.

And then there's Bob Wieland, a Vietnam War veteran who lost both his legs in a mortar mine explosion. After his recovery, he trained and prepared for 18 months and then "ran" across America on his hands! That's right, 2,784 miles on his hands. Bob also set a world record in power lifting and is the only double amputee to finish the difficult Ironman race, held in Kona, Hawaii, without a wheelchair. In 1991, Bob landed a position as the strength and conditioning coach for the NFL football team, the Green Bay Packers.

You see, we are not totally dependent on, or victims of, our genetics, our past conditioning, or even physical restrictions. Our bodies tend to do what they are told. In the long run, luck has very little to do with success or happiness, and the choices we make shape our world. As better choices become engrained as habits, a more powerful belief system unfolds unconsciously and automatically.

So why would anyone choose anything but success?

Some people may not feel deserving of success, or they don't want to endure the pain, pressure, or sacrifice that comes with becoming a champion. Fear is the most common reason people choose not to do what it takes to be highly successful. They fear embarrassment, ridicule, or rejection; they're afraid to fail. That stems from what you believe about and define as failure. I can assure you that an Olympic gold medalist has very different beliefs from the average person, and that's a choice. And that explains why two people can

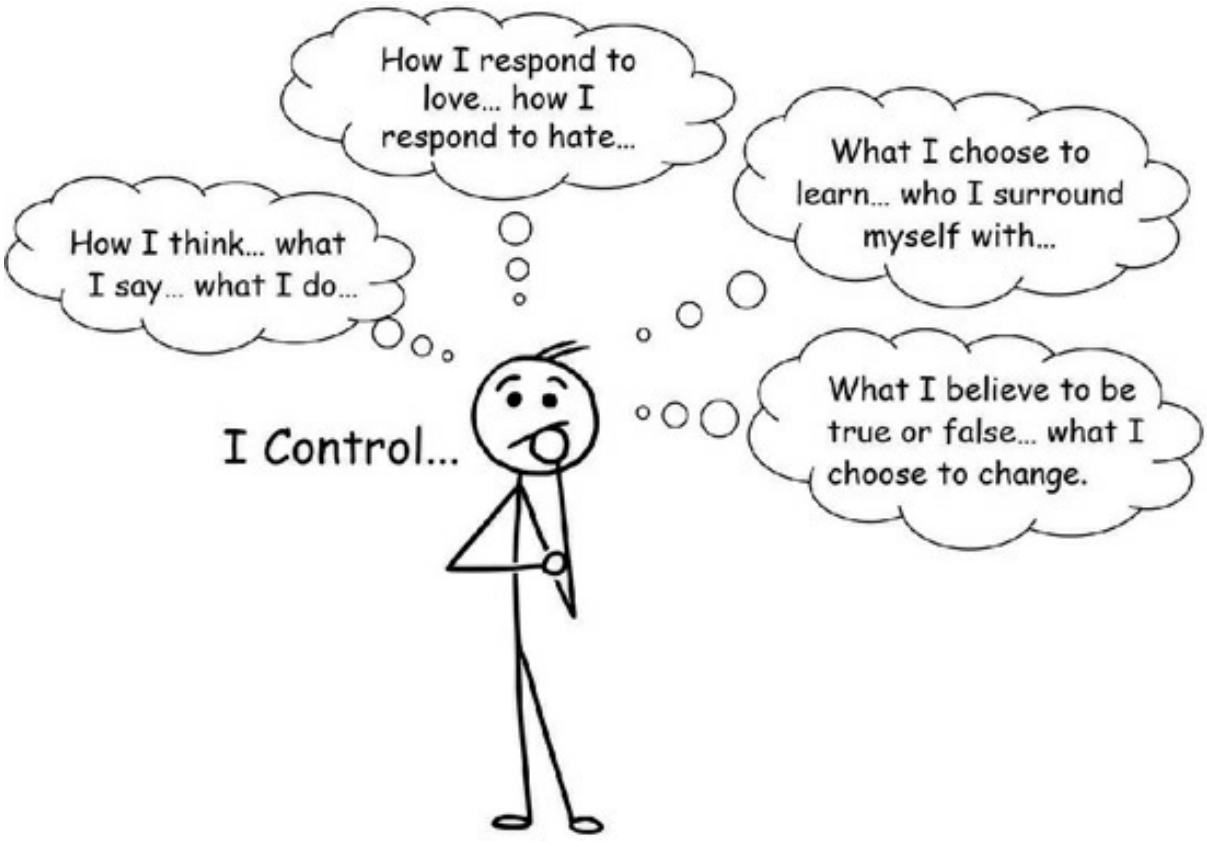
experience the same conditions but end up with completely different results.

Life is like a radio. All the stations are playing simultaneously; it's simply a matter of which one you choose to tune into. A way to win and a way to lose always exist as options. Your circumstances reveal the choices you've made. Champions and elite performers distinguish themselves by assuming *active responsibility*. They seek successful role models, develop a road map for success, and put a plan into action by making incremental adjustments until they achieve victory. They know their successes have nothing to do with luck or fate; rather, they are the result of commitment, dedication, preparedness, consistency and a willingness to pursue a dream. Champions tune into the most important winning trait of all—the belief that winning is a choice.

Controlling the Controllable

You cannot control the world, but you can control yourself, and that's all you need to do to be "in control." Moreover, life is not asking you to be in control; life is simply giving you the opportunity to respond. To utilize your greatest personal power, start by taking inventory. Make a list of all the things you have direct control over. In doing this, you will quickly realize the areas of your life you could leverage simply by exercising the power of choice.

Try it right now! Start the list with the words "I control . . ."


How I respond to love... how I respond to hate...
What I choose to learn... who I surround myself with...
How I think... what I say... what I do...
I Control...
What I believe to be true or false... what I choose to change.

Some people choose to focus on what they cannot control, and that's why they become frustrated and feel hopeless. The things you can't control are going to happen anyway, so there's no sense in getting too concerned or worried about that. Instead, focus your time and energy on the areas in life you have control over. That's how winners operate. They don't obsess over the uncontrollable. They work with intention and never let their minds drift away from the task at hand, knowing that if they put in the effort, the result will take care of itself.

I guarantee you can accomplish much more than you think you can. But until you

accept that winning is a conscious choice, you are incapable of realizing your true potential. You're a malfunctioning winner. Think about it: How hard would people work and persist if they believed the choices that they are making have little or no influence on the outcome? Choosing to win means focusing on what you control and leveraging that freedom through the power of choice. The next time you feel like throwing caution to the wind and putting your faith in blind luck, stop and say to yourself, "Hope is not a strategy; it's not reliable!" Then focus on what it is you have control over and make a real choice.

TRUTH #2
YOU OWN IT ALL

You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The second empowering truth is even more challenging: You are the creator of everything that you experience, and no one has any say over what comes into your life without your permission. You create the life you choose. How you perceive the world and respond to events creates your reality. Therefore, you are the owner of your life and everything in it! Once you recognize this, you will appreciate that life is not about finding yourself or finding what makes you happy. Life is about creating yourself and your circumstances. Not by magically making things appear through positive or wishful thinking, but with a mindset that starts with, "I am the source." With that level of responsibility, you start to view everything as an opportunity, and that is what empowers you as the creator of your own future.

Some people push back on this belief. They respond: "What if something happens randomly by accident, like getting hit by a car? What about someone who gets a catastrophic illness like cancer? Surely, the person did not 'create' that!"

Taking ownership is not about cause and effect. Ownership means taking responsibility, but that does not equal blame. It's about developing and exercising your ability to respond. You make choices, and there are consequences. **Maybe you made the choice to go down a particular street and you got hit by a truck. Did you know the truck was going to hit you if you drove down that street? Does the answer change the fact that you now own the result?**

Ask W. Mitchell, who was burned over 65 percent of his body on July 19, 1971, when a laundry truck turned in front of the motorcycle he was riding. His face and hands were badly scarred, and he lost most of his 10 fingers. Doctors had to cut off his toes and stitch them onto his hands. As horrible as this sounds, it was only the beginning! After his recovery, about four years later he crashed on takeoff in a small aircraft and injured his spinal cord, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. The NTSB investigation indicated that the accident was due to failure to detect a thin layer of ice on the wings during preflight inspection.

During a lecture Mitchell said:

> *For the first time in my life, I fully understood the power of choice. For the first time, I believe that I began to understand that I was responsible for Mitchell. Not blame, not fault, not guilt; responsible. I had the ability to respond! And, no matter whose fault it was, who was wrong, who was bad, who was good, it was me that was in that hospital bed. It was me with short fingers. It was my future.*

To own something means to declare that it belongs to you. Once you become an

owner, you can then be responsible for what you do with it. Responsibility is magnificent! You are responsible for your own life. When you become an owner of everything, good and bad, you are on your way to cultivating the most powerful of all human qualities, the ability to respond.

The pushback for most people is that when something negative happens, they would rather go to blame. We often associate responsibility with guilt or blame: "It's not my fault! It was my environment," "My parents liked my sister better," "I was in the wrong place at the wrong time," "I simply had bad luck," or someone or something else caused it.

Blame is the fastest way to disempower yourself, and the more you default to blame, the more you are developing learned helplessness—giving up because you believe your choices are irrelevant. You feel stranded and unable to change your circumstances because you believe someone or something is controlling you. The fact is, nobody on this planet has the power to make you think or act in any way other than the way you choose. Therefore, taking ownership is the highest form of choice. The pendulum, however, can also swing too much the other way. In taking personal responsibility, people sometimes go all the way to *personal blame*. They tell themselves that they are to blame for everything that "goes wrong" in their lives—for every mishap and misfortune. That's not it, either.

We default to blame because, like a hot potato, we want to pass the responsibility on and get rid of it because it's painful to hold onto. But when you decide to be 100 percent responsible for you, your life transforms to a point where blame doesn't matter anymore; blame gets replaced with acceptance, and you become empowered. The simple truth is, you have the power to do whatever you choose to do with your life. You create your perceptions; you choose how you respond; therefore, you create your reality.

As the Creator, You Are the Un-creator and the Re-creator

Knowing that you are the creator of your world means that you possess the power to re-create your reality. None of us understand this at a very young age, so we are always re-creating ourselves in light of our past. When you acknowledge that you are the creator, you are also empowered to be the re-creator or the un-creator. **Any perception you create, you can change, because our reality is based on how we choose to perceive things—not on how things really "are."** This all starts with the belief that you are the creator, and ultimately you are the owner.

W. Mitchell said, "Sometimes we meet people who spend an awful amount of time as if they are driving through life using the rearview mirror." They sound like this:

"If only I had . . ."
"I should have . . ."
"I could have . . ."
"Wouldn't it have been nice if I had . . ."

He finished with an eye-opening metaphor: "There's a reason the car manufacturers make the windshields so much bigger than the rearview mirror."

Sure, we can learn from past experiences and use them to move ourselves forward. But to spend so much time regretting and worrying about things in the past takes away precious time and energy from what we can control now. The past and the future exist only in our memories and imaginations. The only real thing is now. What we do in the current moment simultaneously creates our past and our future. Once I accepted that everything in my life is a result of the choices I make right now, I became empowered to be the creator of my experiences. Then my life changed—profoundly. Mediocre performers believe their errors and mishaps were caused by factors outside their control: "My opponent got lucky"; "I was

unlucky"; "Life is unfair!" Top performers take responsibility and, in turn, cultivate the ability to respond. They look at accountability as personal power, not self-blame.

Whether or not you buy into the notion that you create everything in your life, one thing is indisputable: Ultimately, you always become the owner. If you fail to take responsibility for your life and are always looking for the villain or someone to blame, someone who caused the bad things to happen, then you will always be waiting for someone to make the good things happen, as well.

Stop waiting! Embrace ownership and create your future today.

TRUTH #3
GREAT ACHIEVEMENT IS A PROCESS

I put my heart and soul into my work, and I lost my mind in the process.

—VINCENT VAN GOGH

Have you ever heard the joke that begins, "How do you eat an elephant?" The punch line, of course, is "one bite at a time." But there's more than a joke in that statement. Helen Keller once said, "I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble." This is a fundamental truth that all champions come to understand. Winning is a process, and you must trust the process and allow it to unfold; otherwise you will give up because you will want too much too fast and make the critical mistake of skipping important steps.

My daughter loves to sing. From a very young age she told me, "Daddy, when I grow up, I want to be a singing star." Like many other young children, though, she had trouble singing in tune. Many of my friends and even family members said that, without natural talent, she would never become a singer. She should pick something else. I told them, "If she loves to sing and believes in herself, she can learn the proper technique. But she'll never believe in herself if we keep telling her she doesn't have 'natural' talent!" Now, a few years later, my daughter sings like an angel. She has been selected to perform in exclusive choirs and even a cappella performances.

To me, she is living proof of what Derek Rydall wrote in his book *Emergence: Seven Steps for Radical Life Change*: "It only takes one note at a time, and before you know it, you're singing."

Start by realizing that greatness comes in stages—not overnight. Achieving a big goal, like developing talent, results from following a plan and taking individual steps. **Every person who ever accomplished something that was thought to be impossible, simply performed a series of small tasks that were possible.** In other words, in order to accomplish big goals, you need to be what I call a "builder"—disciplined and process driven. Builders trust that the results will come if they get the process right. They don't dwell on their mistakes, but instead view them as teachers of valuable lessons in a continuous feedback loop of learning and adjusting. When builders make errors, they tell themselves, "That's one mistake I won't make again." All results, good and bad, are meaningful because the process is being continuously improved.

Unfortunately, most people are the opposite. Instead, they are what I call "wrecking balls." Wrecking balls are fixated on results, and they have limited vision. They get discouraged very easily; if things don't materialize quickly, the wrecking ball gets disheartened and loses confidence. When a mistake is made, the wrecking ball's tendency is to look for someone or something else to blame. A wrecking ball never commits to a process, has tons of excuses, and rarely takes ownership. No surprise that the wrecking ball never

builds anything lasting or wonderful.

The Power to Create, the Power to Destroy

Everyone has both the builder and the wrecking ball inside—just as every human is capable of love and compassion as well as hatred and harm. So which one is going to determine your results: the builder or the wrecking ball? Which one is going to be responsible for what you achieve?

To answer that question, I refer to one of my favorite stories as told by Pema Chödrön in her book *Taking the Leap: Freeing Ourselves from Old Habits and Fears*:

> *A Native American grandfather was speaking to his grandson about violence and cruelty in the world and how it comes about. He said it was as if two wolves were fighting in his heart. One wolf was vengeful and angry, and the other wolf was understanding and kind. The young man asked his grandfather which wolf would win the fight in his heart. And the grandfather answered, "The one that wins will be the one I choose to feed."*

Recognize that we all have both the builder and the wrecking ball inside of us. The key is to feed the builder and starve the wrecking ball. As a builder, you know winning is the result of a great performance, and a great performance is a function of great execution. But thinking about winning can pull your focus off the proper steps. Thinking about process is the answer.

Writing this book is a process; I work on it almost every day: taking notes, refining ideas, and then reworking what I have done. I know if I stick with my process, in the end I will have a book I can be proud of. People who win and become successful learn to love the process of pushing to become their best. In fact, they embody a process-driven life. The old adage tells you it's "all about the journey." To that I'd add, it's all about process—really falling in love with it—and embracing everything that comes with it.

Don't become irritated when you reach an impasse; instead, be intrigued by the challenging staircase that is before you. The process of becoming a champion or realizing a vision really is awe-inspiring. Embrace the journey with open arms, and take each step enthusiastically, one by one.

TRUTH #4
EVERY RESULT CONTAINS A LESSON

There is no such thing as failure, there is just giving up too soon.

—JONAS SALK

No one ever "fails" at anything; failure is an illusion, a judgment, an opinion. In everything we do, we always succeed at producing a result. Every outcome—win, lose, or draw—contains information that informs you about where you are in the process: what you're doing correctly and what needs work. In this way, there is a teacher in everything, and learning from your results is the only way to make meaningful and lasting progress.

Since winning is a process, it takes time, effort, and refinement to get to a big goal. The higher the mountain, the more climbing it takes to reach the summit. Along the way, you will have setbacks. You will fall down—everyone does. If you do not learn to see setbacks as lessons, you will always end up seeing yourself as a failure because no one lives a mistake free life. Making mistakes is inevitable, but learning from them is a choice. The difference

between whether something is perceived as feedback or failure is key. **Some people use the perception of failure as an excuse to give up**. **But you cannot fail unless you see failure as an option and you quit. Success or failure exists only in your mind. A setback is just a result that contains information to evaluate and learn from.**

Coach Bob Bowman described the tenacity of Olympian Michael Phelps: "I've never seen him be discouraged by anything." That's why Phelps is the most decorated gold medalist in history. In contrast, quitters fail to embrace every result as a valuable teacher to learn from. In the words of James Allen, "Let a man rejoice when he is confronted with obstacles, for it means that he has reached the end of some particular line of indifference or folly, and is now called upon to summon all his energy and intelligence in order to extricate himself, and to find a better way."

Those who fear failure have a false sense of what it takes to win. Without a doubt, losing hurts for winners. When that happens, you need to recognize that a failed attempt gives you the information and freedom to carry on and investigate new frontiers in a smarter, more intelligent way. It's impossible to accomplish greatness without error. If you're afraid to make mistakes, you will never succeed in a big way. Because if you're not making mistakes, you're not challenging yourself enough. Buckminster Fuller once said: "If I ran a school, I'd give an average grade to the students who gave me all the right answers, for being good parrots. I'd give the top grades to those who made a lot of mistakes and then told me what they learned from them."

Concealed in every situation we face is a lesson. Some of the results make us happy, while others test us. Every experience serves a purpose. It might inspire us; it might educate us, or it might give us a chance to be of service in some way.

There are two types of people in the world. One group consists of those who are blind to the blessings of enlightenment that come from every so-called failure. The other is made up of people who keep going despite pain and struggle, more excited than ever with newfound knowledge and hope. Which do you choose to be? What are you going to do with the results you produce?

Expect Some Rotten Days

In a dark place we find ourselves, and a little more knowledge lights our way.

—YODA

The key to success is becoming a successful thinker and acting on those thoughts. That doesn't mean that all your ideas and actions will always produce the desired results. At times you will feel like success is unattainable and say to yourself, "This sucks!" You may even feel like giving up. I know—I've been there. When I first pursued stock trading, I went six consecutive years without making a penny. There were days when I felt so demoralized, I almost threw in the towel and called it quits. But I knew every result contained a message, so I embraced my so-called failures, learned the important lessons, and persisted. Then, after years of trial and error, I made more money in a single week than I dreamed of making in a year. I experienced what the English poet Robert Browning meant when he wrote, "A minute's success pays the failure of years." **Go boldly after what you want and expect some setbacks, some disappointments, and some rotten days. Embrace them all as a valuable part of the process and learn to say, "Thank you, teacher."**

In his book *The Winning Mind*, world-record holder and four-time Olympic gold medalist Sebastian Coe wrote, "I have won races that have taught me nothing, but I have rarely lost a race that has not taught me something." When you stop being angry because things didn't work out as planned and you embrace the process, you begin to see the lessons

and the path to success. Then you will be empowered. This is one of the most difficult beliefs to adopt. The belief that *everything* is valuable because *everything* is a teacher. The great philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said, “What does not kill us, makes us stronger.” That’s because nature never gives you a problem without giving you an answer for solving it.

The Navy SEALs have a slightly less eloquent way of putting it: “Embrace the suck.” When you can view both the good and the bad as valuable experiences, you’re open to learning, which is the only way you can improve and persist in the face of adversity. Remember, if you play it safe, choosing not to take risks, you will never know what it feels like to accomplish your dreams. Failing is part of the process of winning and often provides the greatest education. With that knowledge, you should be curious and eager to analyze your results and learn something. Most important, never let rotten days make you give up on your dreams and the process to take you there.

TRUTH #5
WILLINGNESS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN DESIRE

The willingness to do creates the ability to do.

—PETER McWILLIAMS

Sometimes a person will tell me, “I’ve tried everything, and I just can’t succeed.” I always answer, “You couldn’t have tried everything, because if you did, you would have succeeded.” Then I ask, “What are you *unwilling* to do?” That changes the conversation.

When you say, “I can’t,” what you are really saying is, “I won’t.” Whenever you are faced with failure, nature is telling you that you have not done what is required to succeed. It’s not saying you can’t—it’s telling you not until you are willing to do “X.”

It may be that you simply need more time doing what you are already doing. Like a tree needs certain conditions to bear fruit, so does your life. An oak tree can’t grow to full size overnight. **It doesn’t matter how much you want something. The success you ultimately experience will be proportionate to how *willing* you are to do what it takes to succeed, and that willingness will be tested.** It’s good to be tested. We grow and learn through passing tests.

The Marines have a saying, “Everyone wants to go to heaven, but no one is willing to die.” How willing are you to make your dreams a reality?

The life you have is the life you have been willing to put up with. Willingness means you embrace the journey as much as the destination. You become the embodiment of your dream, and you live it. Only when you are truly willing to do whatever it takes, and you align your belief system with your actions, can you reach the stage where no amount of discouragement can knock you off track. For the willing—nothing is too unreasonable. At this point, achieving your goal is just a matter of living your life a certain way and allowing your chosen destiny to unfold without a deadline.

There is always a next step. To keep progressing, you must be willing to take that next step, regardless of how many steps you’ve already taken (and the results of those previous steps). That’s determination! When I first pursued stock trading as a career, I was willing to do whatever it took not only to become good at it, but eventually to become one of the best in the world. I was so in love with the process, I always looked eagerly to the next step, not the final result. Even if I hadn’t become rich and successful from trading, I would still be doing it today. Willingness and passion are the reasons why I became successful!

Just as a tomato seed doesn’t come without purpose, neither did you. You were born with potential. Stop waiting for everything to be perfect! At the risk of hitting a

wrong note or two, sing, my friends. Be willing to explore your potential.

Everyone wants to win, but only those who risk failing can become champions. Knowledge is not enough. Knowing what to do, but not taking action, leads to unhappiness, because you are always thinking, "I could do that." But you don't, and that makes you feel like a failure. Setting a huge goal is the only way to find out how good you really can be. As Henry David Thoreau said, "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you've imagined."

Ask yourself, "What do I want to achieve or become? How willing am I to make it happen?"

TRUTH #6
RECORDS ARE MEANT TO BE BROKEN BY PEOPLE JUST LIKE YOU

Adversity causes some individuals to break; others to break records.

—WILLIAM ARTHUR WARD

Humans are propelled and inspired by trailblazers, those who have gone before us successfully. When you know what works, when you know what others have done, you can set your sights on similar goals and even exceed them. Records are meant to be broken, and leaders show us the way. They motivate us and set a standard for us to surpass, so that we, too, can lead those who come after us. If you have a working brain, you can learn pretty much anything. With the right process backed by empowering beliefs, you can achieve whatever someone else has done—and more. But this only happens when you truly believe that every previous success can and is meant to be exceeded—and that includes you!

When I was a young man, I had this epiphany, of all places, in a movie theater watching the film *Rocky IV*. All the Rocky movies are motivational, but in *Rocky IV*, during the big fight scene, Rocky Balboa is losing to the overpowering Russian, Ivan Drago. Apollo Creed's former trainer (Tony "Duke" Evers) is now Rocky's trainer and cornerman. Rocky comes back to his corner between rounds; he's in awe of the big, powerful Drago. But the Duke delivers the lines that unleash Rocky's belief in himself: "You hurt him, you see he's not a machine; he's just a man." While Drago was a formidable opponent, he was just a man. The Duke's advice to Rocky was, "Be more man!"

Those words led me to aspire to a monumental personal challenge of my own: taking on the trading performance of the Joe DiMaggio of investing. In 1994, I made it my stock trading goal to exceed the investment record of one of my heroes, the great Paul Tudor Jones, who reportedly achieved four consecutive years of triple-digit returns and a fifth year up 99.6 percent. To reach that goal, I would have to return a minimum of 3,950 percent on my money over 5 years, averaging 100 percent per year to turn $100,000 into more than $3 million. Considering that never in my life did I come even close to this level of performance, obviously, it was an incredibly ambitious goal. But with all due respect to Mr. Jones, I knew he was "just a man," and all previous successes provide the road map to greater successes. Therefore, anything he achieved I could exceed.

I studied Paul Tudor Jones, the man—not just the way he traded, but more importantly, his beliefs. I learned that Jones was very risk averse; controlling the downside and limiting losses form a foundational part of his trading approach. Although I never knew much about his specific trading strategy, I approached trading as he did where risks were concerned. I applied that thinking to my own strategy while I worked on improving the process.

With my belief system aligned with that of a proven champion, I was confident I could

achieve what he did and even exceed it. Fast-forward a half decade, and the results were in: I did it! I produced triple-digit returns, 5 years in a row. But my cumulative performance was not the 3,950 percent I had hoped to achieve—it was almost 10 times that—a compounded total return of 33,554 percent. I averaged 220 percent per year, which turns that same $100,000 into more than $30 million! Suddenly, what once was hard to imagine became my new reality.

We will never experience what we're remotely capable of unless we believe that the heroes we admire are really role models, showing us what's possible—what we, too, can achieve and exceed. No matter how high you set your goal, there are always people who can inspire you to be more. They can inspire you with their courage and lead you by example. Then you will see and understand your own potential. Even if you stretch yourself to what you believe to be the pinnacle of your achievement, you will still only be at a fraction of your full capability. In his book *Winning Gold*, three-time world champion wrestler Lee Kemp wrote: "In 1972, Dan Gable became an Olympic champion and an instant legend. In 1976, at the age of 18, I wrestled Dan Gable and won! I was a sophomore in college with only six years of wrestling experience."

Impossible only exists until someone does it. For example, it was once believed to be impossible for a human to run a mile (1,609 meters) in under 4 minutes. The 4-minute mile was seen as a physical barrier that no human could break without causing significant damage to the runner's health. Then on May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister of England ran a mile in 3 minutes, 59.4 seconds. Suddenly, the impossible was possible. And just 56 days later, the Australian runner John Landy ran a mile in 3 minutes and 57.9 seconds. Within 3 years, 16 other runners also cracked the 4-minute mile.

What happened to that perceived physical barrier that had prevented humans from running a mile in less than four minutes? Was there a sudden leap in human evolution? No, a *change in thinking* made the difference.

Often the barriers we perceive exist only in our minds. Beliefs influence what we attempt or choose not to attempt in life. We can get trapped by false beliefs and mistaken assumptions that other people achieve certain goals and milestones because they are "special" and gifted or lucky. That is not only untrue in almost every case; it's also unfair to those champions who worked extremely hard for many years to get to the top. And although our generation will have gone further than the generations before us, we will not go as far as the generation who will succeed us, because our ability to learn makes us limitless. And that includes you! As humans, we're encoded to keep becoming better and better. It's not just technology and artificial intelligence; it's also human thinking and human intelligence! Whatever someone else has done, we can always do better. With the right amount of passion, commitment, knowledge, and training, even you can break world records. Because whether you know it or not, there's a record breaker in you.

But you will never know if you can set a world record, win a local competition, or demonstrate your true potential until you believe in your own ability to learn from your victories, from your mistakes, and from others. You must commit to an unconditional march in the directions of your dreams. Then you will amaze yourself, and quite possibly carve a path that others will want to follow.

TRUTH # 7
IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO BECOME THE PERSON YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE

Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and

make a new ending.

—MARIA ROBINSON

Have you ever thought, “It’s too late?” Other excuses we hear include, “I’m too old or set in my ways”; “I can’t change now”; “I wish I knew earlier what I now know.” Not true!

Gladys Burrill ran her first marathon when she was 86 years old and became famous after completing the Honolulu Marathon at the age of 92. She persevered for 9 hours and 53 minutes to the finish line. As a result, she was recognized by Guinness World Records for her incredible accomplishment.

Teiichi Igarashi, at age 96, became the oldest climber to reach the summit of the 12,388-foot “goddess” known as Mount Fuji, an active volcano about 100 kilometers southwest of Tokyo. Igarashi’s conquest of Fuji came nine days after 91-year-old American Hulda Crooks from Loma Linda, California, became the oldest woman to reach the summit.

I was 50 years old when I started competitive pistol shooting. I was introduced to the sport by a friend. At first, I had little interest in pushing myself to run as fast as I could through an obstacle course shooting a 40-caliber handgun. I also wondered if maybe I was too old to be competitive. But I entered a local competition and applied my winning process. Soon I was competing against shooters half my age, moving more efficiently and even winning my share of matches. I now compete regularly in state and even national championships. This experience has reminded me, once again, that it is never too late to pursue a dream or a challenge, especially when it comes to improving the way you think.

Consider Vinnie Dean Walker, who, at age 89, became the oldest student ever to graduate from Sinclair Community College, earning a degree in sociology. And then there’s Leo Plass, who set a world record in 2011 when he finally finished his coursework and graduated from Eastern Oregon University at age 99.

Susan Boyle said: “There are enough people in the world who are going to write you off. You don’t need to do that to yourself.” To shatter the common thinking that time and age are somehow limiting factors, we need the foundation of a global belief system to empower us. Whether you are 25 years of age or 75, you can always come up with the excuse that it’s too late or you should have started earlier . . . But it’s never too late for anything you want to try, especially to become the person you want to be.

THE CAUSE, NOT THE EFFECT

Our beliefs are not something we refer to once or use only occasionally. These are the gears that make up our internal compass and the invisible force that affects everything we do. Empowering beliefs are the common threads that run through all elite performers. With them we create a supportive mental framework for ourselves, which in turn creates a winning environment. Some people will say, “Sure, it’s easy for a successful person to think positive.” I can assure you that champions held these beliefs *before* they became champions, and that’s why they succeeded—not the other way around. Speaking personally, I can tell you, my beliefs are not the effects of my success; they’re the cause.

If you are swimming against the tide of your belief system, you need to recalibrate. Start by reexamining your own core beliefs. Do you believe that winning is a choice? Do you embrace a process and a journey as much as you do a destination? Do you really believe that anything anyone else can do, you can do as well? Are you committed to learning from every result you produce? Unfortunately, some people answer no to these questions because their beliefs don’t support optimistic thinking about themselves and the world.

There is a foundational hierarchy, one principle building on the next. **If you don’t have the foundation of empowering core beliefs, you are not going to move forward with**

empowering strategies and behaviors. The solution? Choose empowering beliefs!

This is a challenge for some people who have been programmed from childhood—by their background, tradition, or circumstances—to believe certain things about themselves. Their disempowering beliefs convince them that there are limitations on what they can achieve—even on what they can dare to hope for.

It starts with believing in your own ability, which determines your goals and priorities. Then it moves to actions, supported by practices that affirm a positive self-image. Like links in a chain, one leads to the other. But just like that chain, it's only as good as the weakest connection. Start by challenging your limiting beliefs!

Empowering beliefs are within your reach. You already possess everything you need. Don't downgrade the belief you have about your potential simply because you haven't learned to use it correctly.

You are an intellectual human being, which means you are a miracle with capabilities far in excess of even your imagination. Ultimately, you choose what you believe, which means you can be exactly what you envision. It's never too late to liberate yourself and create your own personal power. Your global beliefs are the first step.

CHAPTER 3

BUILDING THE SELF-IMAGE OF A CHAMPION

All these years later, I can still remember the feelings leading up to my first national karate tournament—excitement, nervousness, pressure to perform in front of my family and friends. It was 1982, and I had been to several regional competitions, but I did not have a strong understanding of what it would be like to compete at the highest level—in a national championship. When we pulled up to the arena, I felt a sense of relief because we had driven many hours through a wicked ice storm. But finally we arrived, and I was about to do battle in my first Triple A full-contact karate match. Inside the arena, all the big-name competitors were there. The air was charged with electricity.

I had practiced and prepared every day for this moment. Those who knew me expected me to win, because I had done really well in regional competitions. When it came time for the first elimination round, I entered the ring. There stood my opponent, wearing all black with a blood-red headband. His teammates were outside the ring, all of them wearing the same uniforms with the same headbands—a sign of unity. They yelled encouragement to him. “This cat is nothing.” “Show him, baby; show him.” “This is your house.”

Just before we were about to fight, he started bouncing up and down with his hands stretched out by his sides and was hissing like a snake. I must admit, I was intimidated. When the referee said, “Fight,” my opponent let out a deafening scream. I was caught completely by surprise and distracted. Then came the attack!

Seconds later I was on the floor with a fractured rib. I couldn’t take a breath, the pain was so bad. When I looked over at my father, he was shaking his head in disappointment. I got up and went back to the center of the ring, but I had already lost mentally. It was just a matter of time, and a few points later I was out of the tournament.

It was a long, quiet ride home. I felt totally demoralized, but I never thought about quitting. Not me! I couldn’t wait to get back in the dojo to figure out where I went wrong. I figured I needed better technique and more practice. I told myself, “I’m going to work even harder and improve my tactics until I’m in better fighting shape than anyone else.” More training, more sparring, and more hard work. But it didn’t even occur to me that I had to learn how to train my mind, not just my body.

I had fantastic physical skills; I was even given the nickname “Movie Man” because I could do all the fancy spins and flips like you would see in the kung fu movies. I was great in practice and even at local matches. But during that big competition where the stakes were high and the pressure was turned way up, I became so fixated on the outcome and the fear of being embarrassed if I lost, my process suffered. All the skills I had developed in practice went right down the drain.

That day in the ring, I never got to put my skills to work because I had already lost mentally. It didn’t matter how good I was physically because my self-image was low. I lacked the most important skills of all: presence of mind and the self-confidence to perform on demand, under pressure. I had no mental strategy, and even worse, I didn’t know that my self-image was the real problem.

This became a lesson that has served me well over the years in all my pursuits. Chances are—whether you're dealing with sports, the performing arts, or even sales—this is precisely the area you need to focus on the most. Do you practice and work hard, but your results are below your expectations? If so, the reason is your self-image. If you want to become a champion in any area of life, the number one thing to strengthen is not your muscles, your charm, or your sales pitch; it's your self-image.

Building the self-image of a champion takes sound planning with very specific steps, because it's not natural to habitually do what it takes to build tremendous self-confidence. To the contrary, when we mess up, we tend to think negative thoughts and contemplate disempowering questions such as, "You jerk, why did you do such a stupid thing? What is wrong with you?"

As humans, we have a natural tendency to look for problems. When most people look in the mirror, they immediately find fault: "My nose is too big," "I'm bald," "I'm too fat," "I'm too skinny," "I wish I were blonde," "I wish I were taller," . . . The list goes on and on. And when we screw up, we do the same thing. We fixate on what's wrong, because we want to fix it. Good intentioned, but not the way champions operate. That's why most of us don't have the self-image of an elite performer.

Surprisingly, though, when people are asked about their self-image, most will say it's pretty good. But that answer comes directly from the conscious mind and the ego. What about the subconscious? What self-image has been imprinted there? Do you know? That's the self-image that guides you and controls where you go in life.

Your self-image is created by:

- How you perceive past experiences
- What you believe about what you have been told about yourself
- How deserving and worthy you feel
- How you currently see yourself

Your real self-image is not what you romanticize about yourself consciously, but what is imprinted deep in your subconscious. And that deeper self-image is what determines your level of performance. Your self-image is the repository of all you have been led to believe about yourself. Therefore, it controls how you think and communicate internally. Subconsciously, your inner image may be of the self-doubting, unsure person you were at a much younger age—perhaps all the way back to childhood. Every experience you ever had during your entire life is stored in your brain. How confident and optimistic, or how unsure and defeated, you feel rests in your subconscious and what you believe to be true about yourself based on those experiences. This establishes your identity, and your subconscious mind makes everything you say and do fit a pattern consistent with that identity.

THE "LIKE YOU" ZONE

Your self-image acts as a regulator, like a thermostat programmed to keep the room temperature consistent. When the temperature gets too cold, the heat comes on, and when it gets too hot, the air conditioning kicks in. Your self-image does the same thing by creating a "like you" zone. Is it "like you" to ace a challenge? Or is it "like you" to fall apart under pressure? The mental boundaries of what you consider to be "like you" expand and contract with your self-image. As you convince yourself that it's "like you" to choke under pressure, it becomes part of who you think you are. Eventually, you start to believe "I'm a choker." What you think is "like you" sets your expectations and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Here's how this works. Let's assume you are an amateur golfer, and over the past couple

of years the best round you ever shot was an 86 and the worst was a 115. Then one day, on the front nine you score a 36. That's incredible, you tell yourself. You just need to shoot a 43 on the back nine, and you'll end up in the 70s—your best round ever! Even if you shoot a 50, you'll end up with your top score of 86. Then what happens? Your game falls apart on the back nine, and you blow it (usually on one or two holes with a double or triple bogey). The next week you go out again. This time, you start off with two triple bogies and shoot a terrible front nine—one of your worst ever. But then things get much better. You shoot a better-than-normal back nine and end up with a final score within your usual range of 86 to 115.

Your final score in both instances doesn't outperform or underperform your established range. Why is that?

In large part it's because your subconscious has been programmed with a certain expectation. You've convinced yourself that it's "like you" to shoot between 86 and 115. Then you start to associate this "zone" as part of your identity. You tell people "I'm a bogey golfer."

You can get trapped in a "like you" zone in anything, from sports to business to relationships and life in general. You may have the ability to perform at a high level, but if you don't think "it's like me to win," you will have very little chance of winning. **We do what we do because it's consistent with our identity. The goal is to close the gap between what you're capable of doing and what you think you're capable of doing by improving your self-image.**

A friend of mine always says, "You know me—I'm a stress case." He's not saying, "I get stressed at times" or "I'm currently feeling stress." He has convinced himself that he *is* a "stress case." You don't need to know much more about my friend to figure out that there's probably a decent amount of stress in his daily life.

I first learned about the "like you" zone phenomenon from Olympic Gold Medalist Lanny Bassham. In his book *With Winning in Mind*, Lanny wrote: "The problem for most of us is that we know something has to change for our performance to improve. We just don't want it to be us. We'd prefer that our problem would be solved by buying that new piece of equipment. We'd prefer that if we read another book or took another lesson we would change. We'd prefer that someone else be the problem instead of me, anything but me. But, no one can change your self-image for you. You have to do it yourself and the first step is to admit you are the problem."

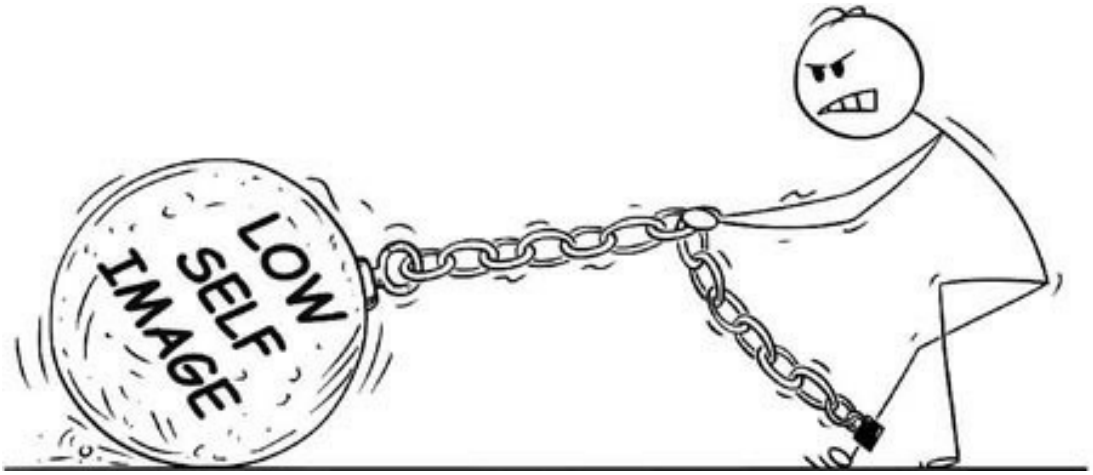
To improve your "like you" zone, you have to change how you see yourself. If you tell yourself, "I fold under pressure" or "I'm a slow starter," you're in danger of believing that to be true. With a strong self-image, your thinking becomes, "I perform at my best under pressure" and "It's like me to start strong and finish even stronger." I'm going to explain how you to develop that mindset.

YOU CANNOT OUTPERFORM YOUR SELF-IMAGE

I used to think that the awkward individual who thought he was better than he was suffered from delusion, so I underestimated him—until that guy beat me in the karate competition. Then I learned about self-image. Never take too lightly this type of person. The unwanted and awkward have a built-in motivation to do whatever it takes to prove they could succeed.

With a healthy self-image comes confidence, and with a poor self-image come hesitancy and doubt. This is why you will see some individuals with less talent beat those with greater ability. Here's what you need to know: You can have passion, desire, a great work ethic, mental toughness, and even natural aptitude, but if you do not build the self-image of a winner, you'll have little chance of winning.

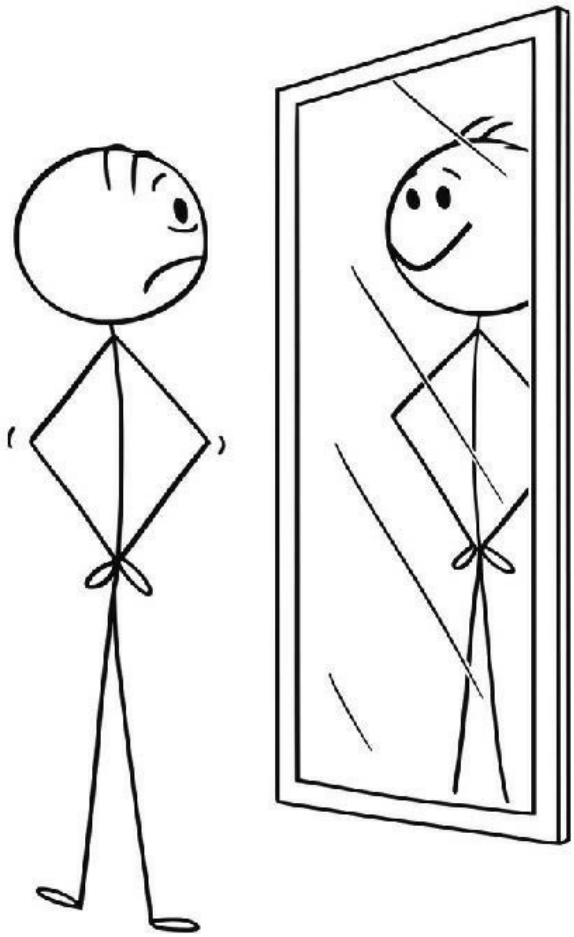
All of us have certain levels of developed capabilities for one thing or another. On a scale of 1 to 10, maybe your talent is at 8—you've got some decent ability. But let's say that your self-image is only at 4. Your performance under pressure, then, is going to be closer to a 4 than an 8. The reason? **No matter how much talent or natural ability you have, no matter how many hours you practice, if you have a poor self-image, you will fail to realize your full potential, because you can only perform up to your self-image.**



Nothing in life will lock you in underperformance and weigh you down more than a low self-image. Given this reality, you are much better off having a self-image that is above your level of skill. This goes against what a lot of people (especially parents) believe. They are afraid of overconfidence and think it's better that they (and their children) are "realistic." The truth, however, is that people are better than their current circumstances. An "unrealistic" self-image allows you to unlock your potential to become the best version of yourself and improve beyond your current level of capability. With a winning self-image, you will be able to outperform even people with more talent but who suffer from a low self-image. Becoming a legend in your own mind may be the most important mental skill you will ever learn, because when your self-image improves, your performance improves with everything you do.

To realize your true potential, your self-image should be at least at the level of, or preferably a bit above, your talent. This might strike some people as odd or even arrogant. How could your identity be *higher* than your ability? **Exceptional people choose to think about themselves in ways that contribute to their success. With a good self-image, winning is always an option. But with a poor self-image, even those who should win often fail.**

One of the most iconic examples of a champion self-image is that of Muhammad Ali, who famously proclaimed, "I am the greatest." Ali *was* the greatest boxer. He knew it. His mental game and his physical preparation were both a 10. No wonder he became a three-time heavyweight champion of the world.



There's an internal harmony in the mind of a champion who views his or her expectations and performance as equal. Your self-image and the success you experience are proportionally related. Winners believe they have what it takes to finish first. You need a strong self-image to believe you can win. Without a high degree of belief in yourself, you will never be able to perform at an elite level, especially under pressure. Self-image is just that important.

THE CONSCIOUS CAPTAIN AND THE SUBCONSCIOUS "CREW"

The self-image resides in the subconscious part of the brain. Think of it as an archive of all the thoughts you ever had about yourself. Every time you think about something, it produces an imprint in your mind. When you perform a task with a positive result, your self-image grows stronger, and when you produce a negative result, your self-image weakens. The self-image generates a view of how you see yourself based on your perception of these imprints, and it has one main job: to keep you where you believe you are.

Fortunately, the subconscious is very susceptible to suggestion. That's good news, because your subconscious monitors all the thoughts you have about yourself, but it does so uncritically. Your subconscious is incapable of deconstructing or analyzing things logically; that's the job of your conscious mind. Ultimately, you control your perception and what you define as "good" or "bad." The subconscious simply records all the inputs you've provided.

We develop skills through repetition and instructions from the conscious mind until the subconscious is capable of performing them automatically. The self-image controls the

amount of subconscious skill you apply based on what it views as being true about you. **The conscious mind is like the captain of a ship, giving orders to the "crew" (the subconscious). The captain plots a course, but the crew actually steers the ship.** Or you can think of the conscious mind like the director of a movie or a play, giving commands to the actors. This understanding allows us to see that the conscious mind has the capacity to set a course. But the subconscious is in charge of carrying it out. If the images and memories in your subconscious contribute to a negative self-image, you won't be able to effectively carry out the plan that your "conscious captain" has ordered. Even though you want to perform well, something always seems to go wrong, and you underperform.

Past failures, however, don't need to dictate the future. You can use the conscious mind to imprint new images and fresh possibilities in your subconscious. This opens the door to a life-changing opportunity: altering your perception of how you experience events. This is what allows you to reprogram your self-image in a way that is supportive of building a winner.

THE ICEBERG THEORY

To understand your conscious mind and subconscious, picture an iceberg. What is visible above the surface—the "tip of the iceberg"—is only about 10 percent of the entire mass. This represents the conscious mind, where your logic, critical thinking, willpower, and immediate focus reside. The much larger portion submerged below the surface is your subconscious, which exerts a huge influence over what you do intuitively and creatively. This is known as the "iceberg theory."

Your subconscious is the repository of your long-term memories, emotions, values, and protective reactions such as fight or flight. Your instincts and what you do automatically or intuitively come out of your subconscious. These memories and experiences are the roots of your beliefs, habits, and behaviors. Some 90 percent of what we do is on a subconscious level (see Figure 3-1). That's why the submerged part of the iceberg is so much bigger; it represents the repository of every influence on our lives.

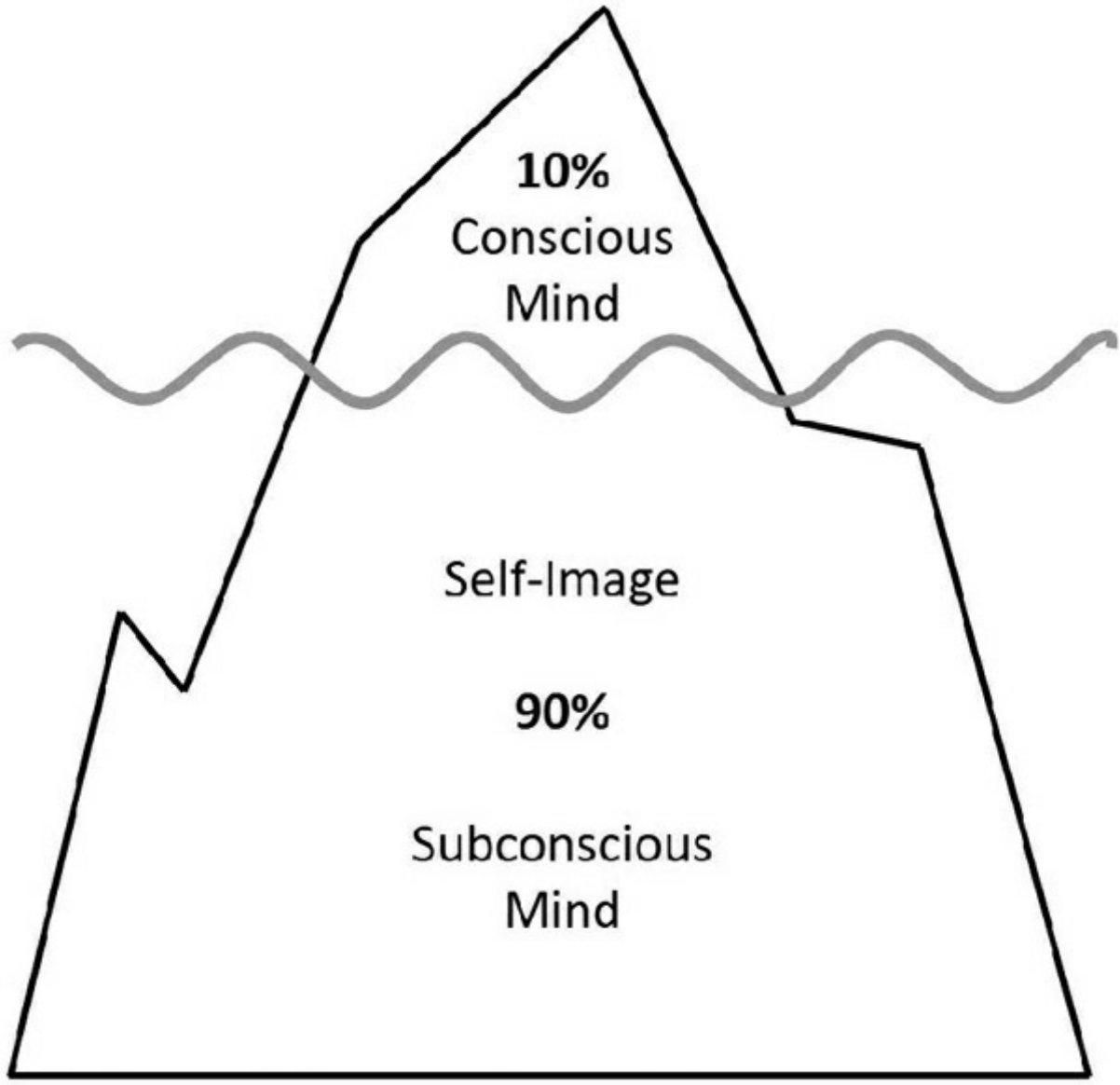


FIGURE 3-1 The conscious mind teaches the subconscious, and the self-image grows and shrinks with every thought you have about yourself. But most of what we do happens unconsciously and is driven by what has been stored deep in our subconscious.

You can't erase what's already in your subconscious, where your learned behaviors and instincts reside. But you don't have to be locked up or guided by your past experiences and subconscious programming. By feeding your subconscious a diet of healthy thoughts, you can improve your self-image. You do this by using supportive repetition and assigning meaning and emotion to the experiences that serve you while minimizing those that are negative. Then a positive, more confident self-image will get "written to the hard drive" of your long-term memory. As a result, your belief in yourself will improve dramatically, and your ability to perform well becomes automatic and unquestionable.

ASSIGNING EMOTIONAL WEIGHT

Have you ever practiced something over and over but still fail to achieve the desired result? If you're like most people, you'll get stressed or upset. Every time you fail to sink the basket, make the putt, hit the target, or close the deal, you are disappointed—maybe even angry.

Even when you finally manage to make a shot or do something right, often you are still fixated on prior fiascoes. No wonder you're hitting only two out of six at the free throw line or you missed five birdie putts in a row! You've enlarged the image of failure in your mind by framing those disappointing experiences with emotion. **As your subconscious archives and processes your memories as images, they are not assigned equal importance. Rather, your subconscious prioritizes peak emotional experiences.**

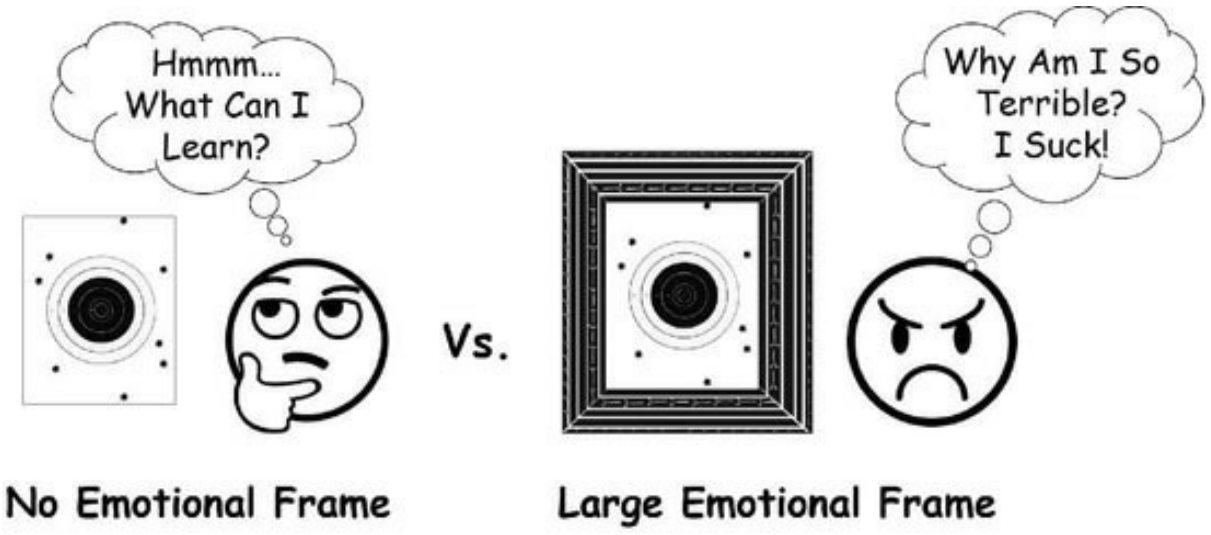
Psychological research confirms that events that happen during heightened states of emotion such as fear, anger, and joy are far more memorable than less dramatic occurrences. If you get into a habit of getting mad when you make an error, you will increase the likelihood of making the same error again. Scientists have now identified the likely biological basis for this: A hormone released during emotional arousal "primes" nerve cells to remember events by increasing their chemical sensitivity at sites where nerves rewire to form new memory circuits. "This phenomenon is something everyone can identify with," said Roberto Malinow of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in New York. "You can probably remember where you were when you heard about 9/11, but you probably don't know where you were on 9/10." In some situations, this process can even become pathological, Malinow said, as occurs in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition characterized by persistent vivid memories of traumatic events.

Thoughts associated with powerful emotions are driven deep into your nervous system and are more memorable, and thus more influential, than thoughts to which you attached little or no emotion. What's most intense is highly regarded by your subconscious. That's important to understand so you can learn the best way to process your experiences going forward.

Your subconscious categorizes experiences as images amplified by the emotions surrounding them. That's why you probably have some deep childhood memories, probably from when you were very young, that have some emotional intensity to them—whether joyful and exciting or sad, frightening, and traumatic. The same applies to the events you're experiencing now that will become memories later. For example, if you go on a 10-day vacation, the memories that will be most vividly recalled will be your peak experiences (the highs and the lows) and the last days, which are the most recent memories. This concept is important because it will play a big role in how you build the self-image of a champion.

EMOTIVE FRAMING

Think of the imprints you store in your subconscious as images that are "framed" with emotion. The image remains the same, but the frame you give it adds more weight or meaning and, in turn, occupies more space in your mind. Research shows that the quickest and most effective way to develop fear of failure is by punishing people when they make a mistake, and the most effective way to develop a poor self-image is to anchor that mistake with intense emotion. For example, the childhood memory of a dropped pass during a football game may not affect you negatively—especially if, right afterward, your teammates encouraged you; the negative emotion surrounding the event was minimal. But what if after you dropped the ball, everyone on the field started laughing at you, and as a result, you felt embarrassed and humiliated? What if, when you got home, your father punished you severely and screamed at you that you were no good—that he was ashamed of you? What kind of impression would that leave in your mind? All that strong emotion would build a big frame around the experience, thus making it more meaningful and memorable.



Your goal is to get to the point where mistakes never get you overly emotional. **The first step is to forget about all the ideas in your head about what is wrong and why you should be doing better. Become interested in what you can learn, and look at your results as a nonjudgmental observer collecting and analyzing data.**

When you make a mistake, minimize emotion. The more you can trust the natural process that is at work, the less you will interfere with it. Focusing on what you can learn will direct your attention to solutions and help ensure that those suboptimal outcomes have little emotional frame. If you get angry and worked up, you'll put a large emotional frame around your poor results—and that will only strengthen the image in your mind, pull you off process, and increase the probability of repeating the same mistake again.

CELEBRATE, CELEBRATE AND DANCE TO THE MUSIC

Since your emotions create the frame, your goal is to put as much weight as you can on your positive results. When you have a good performance, make absolutely certain that you celebrate. This isn't about bragging. You're trying to affiliate as many positive emotions as you can to your victory. This is the time to get emotional! **Whether you are practicing or actually performing, your goal is to assign as much positive emotional "weight" to your good performances and minimize the emotion you attach to poor results.** You want to build large frames around positive outcomes and tiny frames around negative results. Learn how to immerse yourself in the feelings of success. Create a physical and mental celebratory routine. I use a reinforcing statement, telling myself, "That's like you!"

Do a fist pump in the air; dance or shout. Do whatever feels good to you. Reward yourself emotionally. When you acknowledge your good performances by saying and doing something positive, you are literally telling your subconscious that winning—hitting the bull's-eye, making the putt, nailing that presentation, closing the deal, playing every note perfectly—is "like you." That's who you are: a winner, a champion.

When we skip celebration, we cheapen our efforts and fail to positively reinforce our work. We miss the opportunity to strengthen our identity. Creating a winning self-image begins by building an inventory of positive outcomes and amplifying them with emotions. Get in the habit of praising yourself when you do well. Acknowledge your successes, big or small. Even small wins during practice should be celebrated. You're building an inner repository of positive images and feelings.

Watching footage of Tiger Woods, you'll see some incredible moments of fist pumping, screaming, and jubilation after a winning putt drops into the hole. You will see more emotion put into his victories than into the setbacks and blunders. Unfortunately, most people don't celebrate. Maybe they're embarrassed or afraid to lose their humility. For some of you, learning to celebrate your victories may be challenging at first. You might feel awkward patting yourself on the back or throwing your hands up in the air and showing passion and excitement. But if you really want to build a strong self-image, that's exactly what you should do!

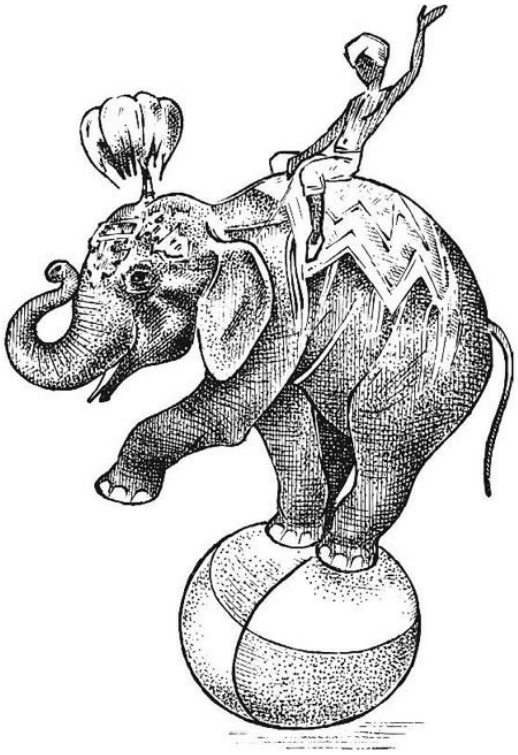
Let's say you hit a bull's-eye in archery. If you just move on to the next shot, without acknowledging your success, it won't register on a subconscious level as strongly as if you make the experience meaningful with emotion. But I can guarantee if you were to miss a bunch of shots, you'd feel plenty of emotion—grumbling, pouting, and attaching negative feelings to the result. And that will register! Your goal is to judge your mistakes unemotionally, like an objective observer. Look at your errors simply as information to learn from, because it is impossible to learn and think well when you're emotional. When you miss or make a mistake, stay calm and use words such as "That needs some work." Or ask yourself an empowering question like "What can I learn from what just happened?" But when you succeed, celebrate with emotion!

SHAPING WITH REINFORCEMENT

We have all marveled at the complex behaviors performed by animals in the circus. They are

trained to execute these behavioral feats through a positive reinforcement technique known as "shaping." At the beginning of training, the animal was incapable of anything even close to the desired behaviors, or "tricks." The trainer chose some behavior the animal was already performing and began reinforcing that behavior. Then, over time, the requirements for reinforcements were gradually altered so that the animal could perform acts that increasingly resembled the final desired behavior, until that behavior had been shaped by the systematic application of reinforcement. **When you reinforce a behavior, you increase the likelihood of that behavior happening again.**

Humans can also learn complex behaviors and build confidence through shaping. To use shaping effectively, start with what you are currently capable of doing and reinforce that behavior. Then gradually require a more skillful level of performance before reinforcement is given. It is important that the shift and demands be realistic and that the steps be small enough so that you can master them and be reinforced. This technique combines goal stretching with reinforcement, and it's a very powerful way to improve your performance at almost anything. Coach Jimmy Johnson once noted, "We rely 90% on positive reinforcement." Johnson was the first and one of only three football coaches to lead teams to both a major college football championship and a Super Bowl victory.



A comprehensive review of research on the effectiveness of behavioral techniques for enhancing sports performance revealed a consistently high success rate for the systematic use of positive reinforcement techniques. In one study, positive reinforcement was used to enhance the performance of a youth football team. The coach selected three different offensive plays. Let's call them Plays A, B, and C.

During the first phase of the experiment, data were carefully collected on how often the stages of each play were executed correctly. Then the coach began to systematically apply reinforcement procedures to Play A. Each time the play was run in practice, the coach checked off which of the elements were successfully executed and praised the players for the stages that were run successfully. Reinforcement was not applied when Plays B and C were run.

After a period of time, the reinforcement procedure was shifted to Play B only and later to Play C only. A comparison of the percentage of stages executed correctly before and after introduction of the reinforcement procedure indicated that performance increased for all three plays, but only after reinforcement was introduced. The level of performance for Play A improved from 61.7 percent to 81.5 percent when reinforcement was applied, but execution of Play B and Play C did not improve until reinforcement was also applied. When this occurred, execution of Play B improved from 54.4 percent to 82 percent, and execution of Play C improved from 65.5 percent to 79.8 percent.

Clearly, the systematic use of reinforcement led to a substantial improvement in performance. Other studies have shown similar performance and improvement in gymnastics, swimming, baseball, golf, and tennis. And don't wait to reinforce. The timing of reinforcement is another important consideration. **Other things being equal, the sooner reinforcement occurs, the stronger its effects on behavior. Whenever possible, try to reinforce a desired behavior as soon as it occurs.** In the beginning, before a behavior or skill is highly developed, reinforcement should be applied frequently.

Frequent reinforcement not only will help you strengthen your desired response but will also provide you with frequent feedback about how well you're doing. Positive reinforcement helps change behavior for the better, while criticism stabilizes negative behaviors and blocks change.

Positive reinforcement should include:

- Praise
- Instruction
- Emotional anchoring

You should minimize:

- Criticism (instead, use messages such as "Needs work" or ask "What did I learn?")
- Negative emotions (replace with encouragement and positive self-talk)
- Negative imagery (replace with desired images—visualize what you want to happen)

KEEP IT POSITIVE

Researchers have found that negative thinking virtually guarantees a poor performance, and poor performance fosters a low self-image. As we've discussed, you should celebrate your victories and give yourself positive reinforcement; when you mess up, you should minimize your negative commentary or inner dialogue. You're not ignoring mistakes or pretending that a poor performance is a good one. You're just focusing more on the facts, without dramatizing them. **While a positive attitude won't always guarantee a great performance, a negative attitude always hurts performance.**

Let's say you're practicing a difficult piece of music, and you just can't get through it without making some mistakes. You should never assign any more weight to your mistakes beyond telling yourself "That needs work." It's an acknowledgment of fact, without attaching emotions or self-judgment to it. Save your emotions for when you get it right and celebrate; until then, look at your mistakes more analytically with a degree of detachment.

Making it personal by thinking "I'm terrible" or by asking questions such as "What the heck is wrong with me?" will result in imprinting images you don't want in your subconscious. **Critical self-talk won't make you any better. Instead, you'll get more of what you're trying to avoid. Minimize negative dialogue and emotion around a poor**

performance. Every one of us has two conversations in our heads fighting for control. One is a critic, and the other is a cheerleader. Your job is to turn down the volume on the criticism and turn up the volume on the support and encouragement. That starts with mindfulness. Become hyperaware of what you say or think after a "swing and a miss."

In baseball, for example, instead of telling yourself "Don't miss" or "Don't pop-fly," you should encourage yourself to "make solid contact." When making a speech, it's counterproductive to think "Don't freeze on stage"; rather, it's "Draw positive energy from the audience." Whatever you're doing, focus on solutions and a positive outcome backed by encouraging self-talk. You'll be far more likely to perform at your best.

Also, do not spend time listening to the complaints of others, or you will soon inherit their problems. Your self-image is always moving you toward what you are reinforcing. For example, if you're at a shooting competition and you are having a conversation about "missing"—even if it's about someone else missing or not missing—all your subconscious hears is "missing." This is especially critical right before you are about to perform or compete. During that time, I refuse to engage in any negative conversations or banter. **You should talk only about your good performances and what you want to see happen to improve the probability that you will have more good performances in the future.** And be careful not to complain when something goes wrong. Complaining is negative reinforcement. Remember something that you did well instead and focus on solutions. Fill your thoughts with your best performances, and you will increase your chances of being successful.

PROGRAMMING A WINNER'S MENTALITY

Learning to change my attitude and reprogram my self-image literally transformed my life. I grew up poor, which encouraged a poverty mentality. As a result, I did not have a lot of confidence as a young child. The reason was my poor self-image. My parents divorced when I was just a small boy. My mother had to work two jobs to support us, so she couldn't take me to sporting events like soccer, baseball, football, and basketball. Having grown up without much of a support system, I had to learn to have self-confidence all by myself. When I played Little League baseball, for example, I'd see all the other kids who I thought were better off than me because their family and friends were at the field cheering for them, while I was all alone. I'd see those kids and think, "Wow, they must be really good!"

I was giving weight to the wrong things, but my subconscious didn't know that; it was just taking "instructions" from my conscious mind. My fears and lack of confidence kept getting reinforced to the point that my subconscious became a storehouse of negative thoughts that reinforced a mindset of unworthiness. No wonder when I competed in my first major karate match, I reverted to that little boy with a low self-image. I had not yet developed the awareness, confidence, and coping skills of a winner.

Over the years of coaching traders, teaching at seminars and universities, and talking to thousands of people, I've learned what a common experience this is. The self-image created in childhood affects our entire life, and it explains a lot. Maybe by the time you reached adulthood, you went into business believing that your education and talent would be enough. But then you fell short of your expectations—maybe you even failed. What happened? Other people are successful, and some not as talented or as smart as you! The culprit is almost always a poor self-image (Figure 3-2).

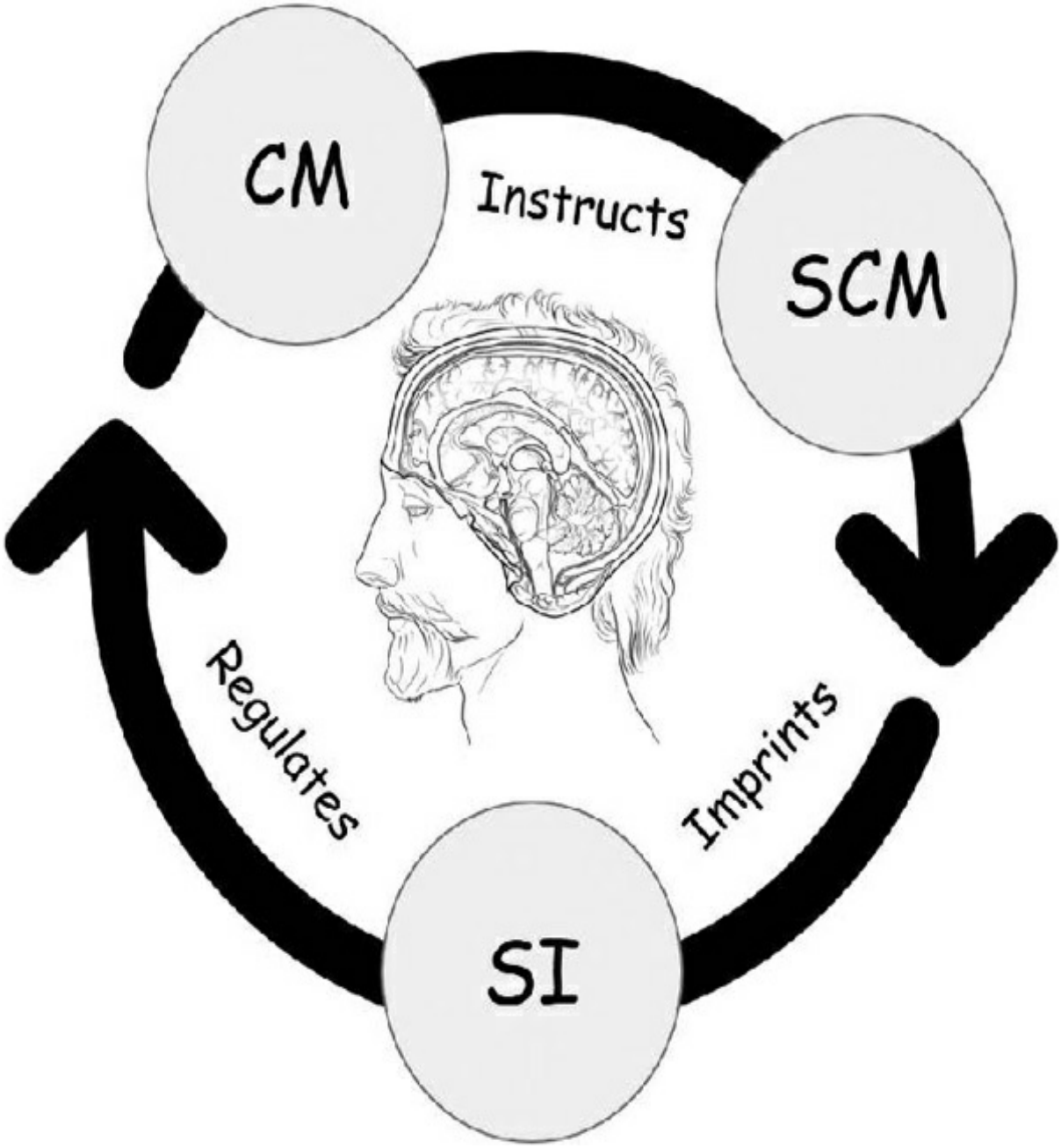


FIGURE 3-2 Your conscious mind (CM) gives instructions to your subconscious mind (SCM), and your subconscious mind carries out those instructions up to the level of your self-image (SI). You are most powerful when all three are working together in harmony.

The good news is it's never too late to make a change. You do this by getting your conscious mind, your subconscious, and your self-image working together harmoniously. When each is supportive of the other, you are operating in an optimal state. It's not enough to just "think positive." To reprogram your self-image, you need to go deeper and program your subconscious down to the root of your identity. When we focus on an image of ourselves that is congruent with who we want to be and consistently reinforce that idea, things begin to change and appear with little effort or struggle.

BECOMING UNCONSCIOUSLY COMPETENT

The teaching relationship between the conscious mind and the subconscious can be compared with learning to drive. Let's say you don't know how to drive so you enroll in driving school. You start in a classroom, watching videos and reading about how to operate an automobile. You're gathering information in your conscious mind. Then you and your instructor get into the car for the first time. Because this is a brand-new experience, you are operating at a very conscious level. You don't have any subconscious skills or instincts to draw from. You hit the gas too much and you brake too hard because you are not yet competent.

Many miles later, driving becomes innate and unconscious. You still pay attention to the road, but your driving is more like "autopilot" with your subconscious in charge. *You're unconsciously competent*. But that wouldn't have happened if your conscious mind had not first gathered all the information and experiences necessary for you to become a competent driver and imprinted those images in your subconscious. Then, as you successfully drove the car, your confidence grew and so did your self-image.

A positive self-image acts like the gas pedal or accelerator. But when you lack confidence, you are reluctant to step on the gas and may even ride the brake. Having a poor self-image and feeling undeserving are tantamount to slamming on the brake. With confidence, though, comes the willingness to accelerate. Your self-image is the key determinant of how confidently you proceed in one direction or another.

CATCH YOURSELF DOING SOMETHING RIGHT

Do you instinctively gather evidence to prove you are a success or a failure? Think about that carefully, because it's a very important question. When you make a good golf or tennis shot, do you say to yourself, "I guess I just got lucky that time"? Or when you hit a bad shot, do you think, "Why do I always do that?" Some people habitually gather evidence that proves they are a disappointment, even without realizing it. A winner knows he hit a bad shot, but the thought process is always, "What did I learn from that? Next time I'll hit a better shot." Then after a good shot, the thought process is, "That's like me to hit a great shot."

See the difference? **None of us are perfect, so there will always be mishaps. But none of us are complete failures either. There are always moments of success or progress. Make it a habit to catch yourself doing something right. This is the habit of champions.**

Winners use their best to make themselves even better. Regularly tune into feelings from past moments of success; the more you practice this, the more empowered you will become. Recalling those feelings on demand will give you confidence when you need to perform under pressure, including reaching milestones and overcoming setbacks on your journey toward an important goal. By learning how to draw from past successes, your expectation of success becomes nearly automatic. You'll gain the most important element you need to become a winner: the ability to know that if you put in the work, the result will be favorable.

Most people, when they screw up, will, in frustration, ask the question, "What's wrong with me?" or immediately default to "Why did I do something so stupid?" They sincerely want to locate and correct the problem. Sounds logical, right? It doesn't work!

Reasons We Don't Focus on Our Strengths

It's human nature to gravitate toward negative thinking just as we are about to enter a high-pressure situation. Suddenly, we start focusing on all the things that could go wrong and all the things that went wrong in the past. This will undermine your confidence and cause you to underperform.

There are a number of reasons we don't focus on our strengths:

- We are encoded through evolution to be vigilant for problems.
- Problems often feel pressing.
- Social norms dictate that we retain some modesty.
- We are not always aware of our strengths.
- We often believe that it is our weaknesses that offer the greatest areas for growth.

Stop thinking so hard about how and why you are failing. Instead, only think about your successes, never your failures. **If you focus too much on how you failed, you will become an expert on failing. If you find yourself dwelling on mistakes or worrying about how you're going to perform, immediately shift to what you did well in the past and envision yourself being at your best.** Focus on what you want to see happen. Mentally go to that place by reliving your best moments and the feeling of success. Or relive a time when you bounced back from adversity. The only way to look at your errors in an effort to correct them is do it this way: Ask yourself, "If that didn't work, what would a good outcome look like?" or "What would I have to do to get it right?" Then visualize yourself doing it.

A good exercise to help you to start thinking this way is to write a story about a time when you were at your best. What are you most proud of? You have done many things right during your life. Start catching yourself in those moments as they happen and revisit them from time to time. As you get into the habit of re-creating them mentally, you will be on your way to building the self-image of a champion.

KEEP A VICTORY JOURNAL

There's an imprinting that takes place for every successful action you have ever performed in the past. With that imprinting comes a feeling or emotional frame. To create a winning mindset, your goal is to relive those feelings as often as possible. When you reactivate and recapture that winning feeling, you also stimulate the winning action patterns that accompanied it.

It can be as simple as a spiral-bound notebook. By journaling your successes, you are building an inventory of self-esteem-supporting data. Later, when you need a boost of confidence and you want to step into a winning frame of mind, you can read your victory journal. When you are about to embark on something challenging or scary, just before you are about to step on stage or make that big business pitch, refer to your journal and you will be reminded that you can win, and more importantly, you will remember what it felt like. You can also include photos and clippings, or whatever helps you revisit the feelings of your past successes. In Chapter 10, I will explain how to use video to build a strong self-image and increase confidence before you perform.

TALENT IS NOT ENOUGH

In closing, it's important to know there are many talented people in the world. But talent alone won't make you a winner or a champion. If you don't have the self-image of a winner, you will become just another "skilled failure." These people have ability and in some cases are naturally talented, but they lack a healthy self-image, and that puts them out of balance. Often, it comes down to what they were told or experienced in the past that caused them to doubt themselves. They've been led to believe that they're unworthy or that they're not fully capable. Some simply are afraid to fail and risk embarrassment, ridicule, or rejection because they have connected their worth as a person to their performance as an athlete, a businessperson, or a wife or a husband.

If this describes you, it's time to stop carrying around a mental picture of yourself as someone less capable than others, and to start building a powerful, confident, and enduring self-image. Because it's never too late to be the person you always wanted to be. But you must commit to building your "inner champion." That is, developing your skills to the highest level, while also building your self-image to the highest level. Then you'll be on your way to be all you are capable of becoming.

Later in the book, in Part 2, "Mastering Perfect Practice," we will explore the techniques and strategies for building skills and, at the same time, building and maintaining a strong and healthy self-image.

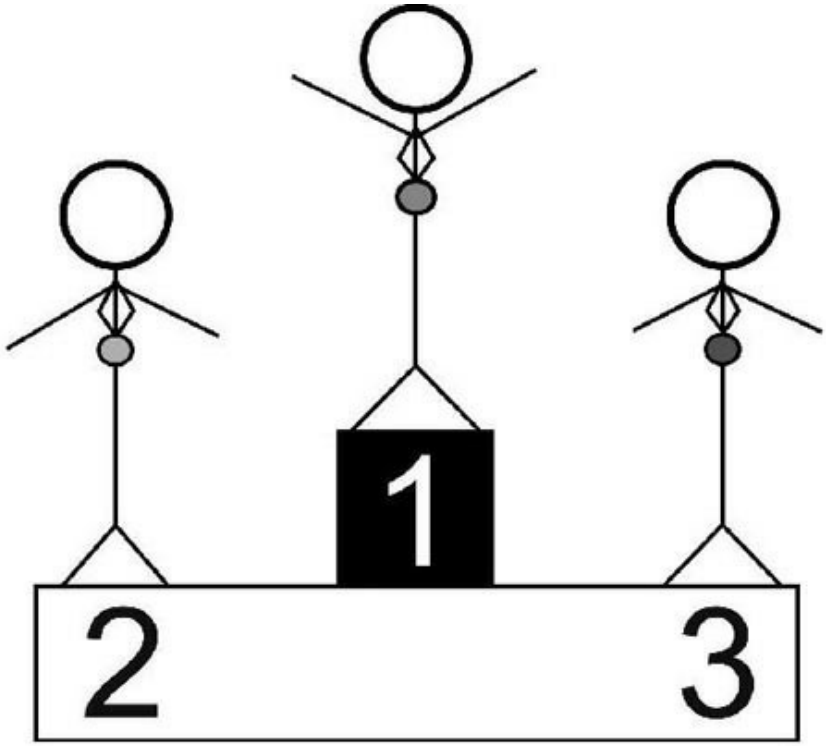
CHAPTER 4

EXPECTANCY—THE KEY TO COMMITMENT AND PERSISTENCE

If you are serious about accomplishing a big goal or doing something amazing with your life, you'll need to be committed. While there is a definition for the word in the dictionary, I assure you the expression "I'm committed" doesn't mean the same thing to everyone. If you have ever made a commitment to yourself or someone else and, for whatever reason, didn't follow through, you know that saying you're committed isn't enough. Being committed is more than just a word. **My definition of commitment is simple: doing the thing you said you were going to do long after the excitement and jubilation you initially felt has faded.** When the enthusiasm is gone, when you realize just how much effort and determination it will take to achieve your goal, it takes real commitment to keep going—no matter what.

The key to attaining that level of commitment is *expectancy*. Those who *expect* to win commit—not out of hubris, but because they are deeply and truly dedicated to persevering until they achieve a successful outcome. For you, this must be a commitment not only that you make intellectually—you know what you have to do—but, more important, that you make emotionally. You know what winning feels like, so you are driven to re-create that experience.

Tara VanDerveer, coach of the 1996 U.S. Olympic women's basketball team, wanted to deepen her team's commitment to win. Beyond the physical training alone, she wanted each team member to have a deeply emotional experience of what it would feel like to be a champion. She conducted a mock medal ceremony at the Olympic basketball arena in Atlanta months before the Olympic Games, so that each player experienced the gold medal being placed around her neck. VanDerveer wanted her athletes to create in their minds the emotional exhilaration of winning the gold medal to enhance their motivational drive and commitment. Several months later, they all got to experience the thrill of winning the Olympic gold medal for real!



Great champions commonly display an air of confidence that separates them from others. They've earned that right through their hard work and preparation. **The best not only expect to win; they know deep down inside they're going to win because they have committed to doing what it takes to achieve victory.**

Winning isn't everything—but wanting to win, training to win, and expecting to win is. When the emotions get involved, when you see and feel something viscerally, commitment intensifies. If your doctor warns you of a life-threatening medical condition, you're emotionally charged. Motivated by the fear of dying, you take dramatic actions to improve your health: quitting smoking, losing weight, and eating healthily. An emotionally stimulated expectation, however, isn't limited to the "fear factor" of negative consequences. Our emotions and the taste of winning can and should create for us the exhilaration and expectation of being a winner. In the case of the 1996 women's Olympic basketball team, knowing what it felt like to be on that podium and wearing a gold medal created a powerful emotional experience the players were able to recall and re-create for themselves in practice and during competition.

Michael Jordan once said, "You must expect great things of yourself before you can do them." Everyone wants to be a winner, but only those who truly believe they will become champions actually have a chance. Wanting a gold medal is a conscious desire. Expecting a gold medal is an unconscious belief. There's a huge difference between the two. In his book, *Winning Gold*, three-time world champion wrestler Lee Kemp said, "As a young wrestler, I used to make an award stand in my bedroom and role-play getting up on the #1 spot after hearing my name announced as the champion."

EMBRACING THE JOURNEY

As you set out to build the mindset of a winner, you need a deep commitment to persevere, rooted in expectancy. Otherwise, you're at risk of fading at the first sign of an obstacle. After all, people make so-called commitments all the time. Then the snags, glitches, and difficulties

surface, as they inevitably will with any endeavor that's worthwhile. Challenges arise, obstacles get in the way, motivation stalls, and doubts start to nag at them. All these negative feelings create an emotional Achilles' heel—a weakness that threatens to erode not just their enthusiasm, but also their ability to move forward with confidence. Their commitment starts to waver.

Those who give up when the going gets tough can usually find a million excuses: "It's harder than I thought." "It interferes too much with my social life." "It really wasn't what I wanted anyway." This is why gyms are filled with new members in January, but by April or May few remain committed. When we make a promise but ignore the amount of work necessary to carry it out, we miss the real meaning of commitment. Imagine a student committing to getting straight As but not putting much time into studying. Without the earnest devotion to achieve the desired end result, that so-called commitment is only an empty promise. The reason why so many people give up and quit is simply a case of false expectancy; they are looking at obstacles as drudgery instead of accepting them as an electrifying part of the process.

When we initially make a commitment, we are excited and hopeful. Then challenges and obstacles cause us to question our mission and lose confidence. Eventually, our strength and resolve are tested. A few real achievers, though, keep going no matter what. They understand that a commitment isn't just about the result; it's about the process of achievement. **When you make a real commitment, you know that a successful outcome will only materialize as a result of executing the proper steps. You commit to *a process*—and you embrace the journey.**

Let's say someone had a goal to climb Mount Everest, the tallest (29,029 feet) and most famous mountain on the planet. More than 600 people a year reach the summit of Everest, which is about half the number who make the attempt. So it's conceivable that someone could make Everest his or her goal. But a challenge like standing on the "top of the world" at Everest requires a commitment to a very demanding process. First, there is all the conditioning and training, including practice climbs on high peaks. Even when you reach Nepal for the southern approach up Everest (the route most people take), you've only just begun. Climbing Mount Everest doesn't happen in one quick move. It's a progression from base camp to base camp, waiting for the right conditions, surviving storms, and enduring a grueling environment. *That* is the process or the climb; *that* is the commitment. Reaching the summit is only the reward. As Sir Edmund Hillary, who along with Tibetan mountaineer and guide Tenzing Norgay became the first to reach the summit of Everest, famously said, "It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves."

When you accept everything on your paths as a necessary part of the process, you stop looking at setbacks and mishaps as reasons to quit, and you start looking at those so-called failures as important steps and exciting opportunities.

Hillary spent years training and climbing, including earlier failed expeditions. But on May 29, 1953, he and Norgay accomplished what some considered impossible. Powered by the commitment to put one foot in front of the other until there were no more steps to take, they stood at the highest point on earth.

It's safe to assume that Hillary and Norgay weren't just in great shape and mentally prepared. They also had a deep emotional commitment to reach their goal—just like Coach VanDerveer's basketball team. With this kind of emotionally charged expectancy, you go beyond results alone and commit to something much bigger. You trust your training and stay with the process, and all the while your emotions are pulling you toward your goal.

THE POWER OF EXPECTATION

Most people know, intellectually at least, that achieving a big goal takes commitment and persistence. But few really experience what it means to persist in spite of the difficulties and the odds. That persistence comes from your level of expectation.

Think about it. **If you were absolutely certain that you would be successful, would you persist? Of course, you would! It's a matter of your expectancy or a sense of certainty that it really is worth the effort.** Ask yourself: "What am I certain about? What am I willing to do unconditionally and stay the course—no matter what—until I succeed?"

Expectancy can affect us in strange and unexpected ways. Without the proper perspective, expectations can trigger fear of failure. Studies have shown that if you ask a person to crumple sheets of paper into balls and toss them into a wastebasket from three different distances—directly over the basket, from 15 feet away, and from 40 feet away—the most anxiety will be felt at 15 feet.

Standing over the basket, everybody knows success is virtually guaranteed; there's no expectation of failure. From 40 feet away, the distance is so great, people have no expectation of succeeding. But from 15 feet, they feel they should be able to toss a ball of wadded paper and make a basket, but also know there's a chance they could fail.

So how can people have high expectations while controlling their fear? **Peak performers distinguish themselves from those who merely do well by having a particularly strong sense of expectancy. At the same time, they detach from pressure by focusing on process, which drives a winning performance.** For me, the greatest success came when I finally decided to forget about results and just concentrated on being the best I could be. I focused on getting the process right; then success followed. To illustrate my point, let me tell you a funny little story:

One day a friend of mine came to visit me and stay for a few days at our home. He said, "I would like to make you some matzo ball soup; I make it the best."

"Great!" I told him. "I love matzo ball soup."

As I savored his amazing soup, I asked him, "Jay, how did you make it taste so delicious?"

"Simple," he replied. "I followed the directions on the box."

CAN YOU BAKE A LEMON CAKE?

At my stock trading seminars, after three days of full immersion in my investment strategy, I ask everyone in the room, "How many of you expect to go out and, over the next six months, achieve a 100 percent return in your investment account?" Each time, the response rate is about the same: Out of every hundred people in the room, no more than a few raise their hands.

Now consider the fact that they've just received *everything* they need to know about how I trade stocks—30 hours of explanations and examples. Even past attendees are there who are already achieving this goal. They have all the lessons, the illustrations, and the written materials that lay out the plan for achieving superperformance in the stock market. Yet no more than a fraction of the attendees say they expect to accomplish it.

"I cannot guarantee that those of you who raised your hand will hit that triple-digit goal," I tell them. "But here is one thing I can guarantee: Those who did not raise their hand definitively will not do it."

At that point, the air just comes right out of the room. Some people get nervous, and some are visibly upset. Last year, one man stood up and asked, "So what am I going to do now? Are you telling me that I can't do this, that I just wasted my time?"

"No," I told him. "By not raising your hand, *you* are telling *me* that you can't do this. I'm telling you that you can! Like anything else you've done in your life, this is a process, and

I'm sharing with you my winning process. If you have ever in the past followed a plan, then this should be no different."

Then I ask another question: "If I were to give you a recipe for a lemon cake, how many of you think you could go home and bake the cake?"

All the hands go up.

The difference is how you mentally frame the challenge. Are you gazing up at the summit of the mountain and thinking, "Wow, that looks high"? Or are you thinking, "If I follow a process (just like the lemon cake recipe) and focus step-by-step, base camp to base camp, I can string it all together and reach the top"?

I pause just long enough to let those words sink in. Then I add, "The question you need to ask yourself is, 'Why didn't I raise my hand?'"

THE ENDOWED PROGRESS EFFECT

People will work harder to achieve something if they believe they are close to completing or attaining it. When we know we're not starting from zero, we're more likely to be motivated and push ourselves. This is known as the "endowed progress effect," a phenomenon that reduces the perceived amount of effort necessary to accomplish a goal, while increasing the feeling of progress already made toward it. So how does this correspond to attaining peak performance and achieving your goals?

Think of ways in which you have already made progress toward a goal or how you are starting with a leg up. By doing this, you'll be more likely to maintain your motivation and discipline in pursuit of your goal.

You should quantify your progress visually and figuratively, so you can see and feel that you are not starting from zero. Find ways to measure the progress you've already made toward a goal or in life in general. Even if you haven't started yet, you have certain traits, capacities, and advantages that can pull you farther along mentally. No matter how small you think they are, they count—big time!

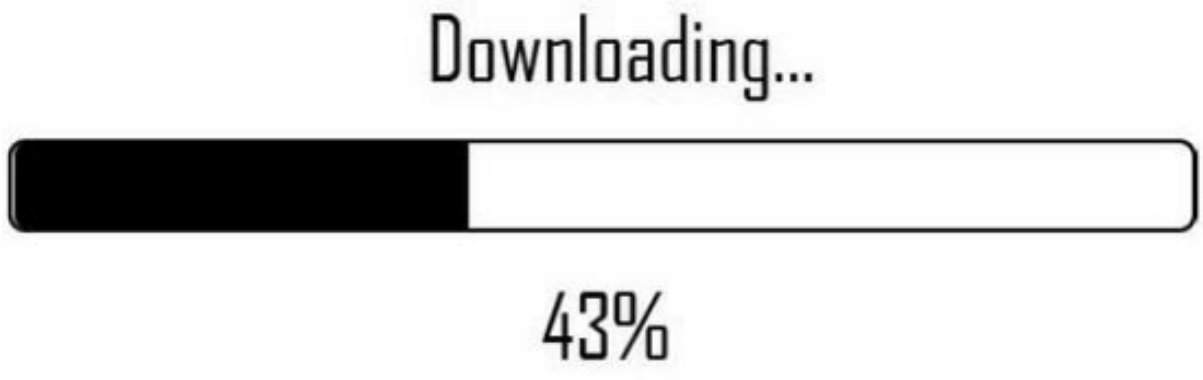
Let's say your goal is to learn how to play the piano. Even if you've never played the piano before, that doesn't mean you don't have something that gives you better mental proximity than starting from zero. Maybe you already have good finger dexterity from playing another instrument, or perhaps you have long fingers that will help you hit the notes better. If you have no experience whatsoever, that means you have no bad habits to break that could impede building new skills. In your mind, you're starting from, say, 25 percent instead of 0 percent, and this can be significant in giving yourself a mental edge. By giving yourself some advancement (even artificially in your mind) toward a goal, you will be more motivated to reach your goal.

Researchers Joseph C. Nunes and Xavier Dréze tested the endowed progress theory using loyalty cards for car washes. They handed out two different cards, one requiring 8 purchases to earn a free car wash and the other requiring 10 but having two spaces already stamped on the card. Regardless of which card a customer received, they all required an equal amount of effort (8 purchases) to earn a free car wash. Yet the artificial advancement toward the goal created with a 10-space card and two "free" stamps led to a significant result. Nine months after giving out the cards, almost twice the number of the people who were given the cards with two free stamps had gone on to redeem them versus those who were given the 8-space cards without stamps.

In the 1930s, psychologist Clark Hull timed rats running in a maze. The closer the rats got to their reward (food), the faster they ran. Researcher Judson Brown expanded on the study in the 1940s by attaching harnesses to the rats running toward food so he could measure how strongly the rats pulled when they were stopped. Brown found that rats that stopped

nearer the food pulled harder than rats farther away from the food.

The endowed progress effect shows how providing some type of progress toward a task generates *even more* momentum because people perceive they are closer to a goal. That, in turn, makes them try even harder to attain it. PayPal, for example, uses green checkmarks to let users know how much they've completed in their profile and what they have left to do. The idea of having just 20 percent or 10 percent to do can be really motivating because you want to see that 100 percent and feel a sense of completion.

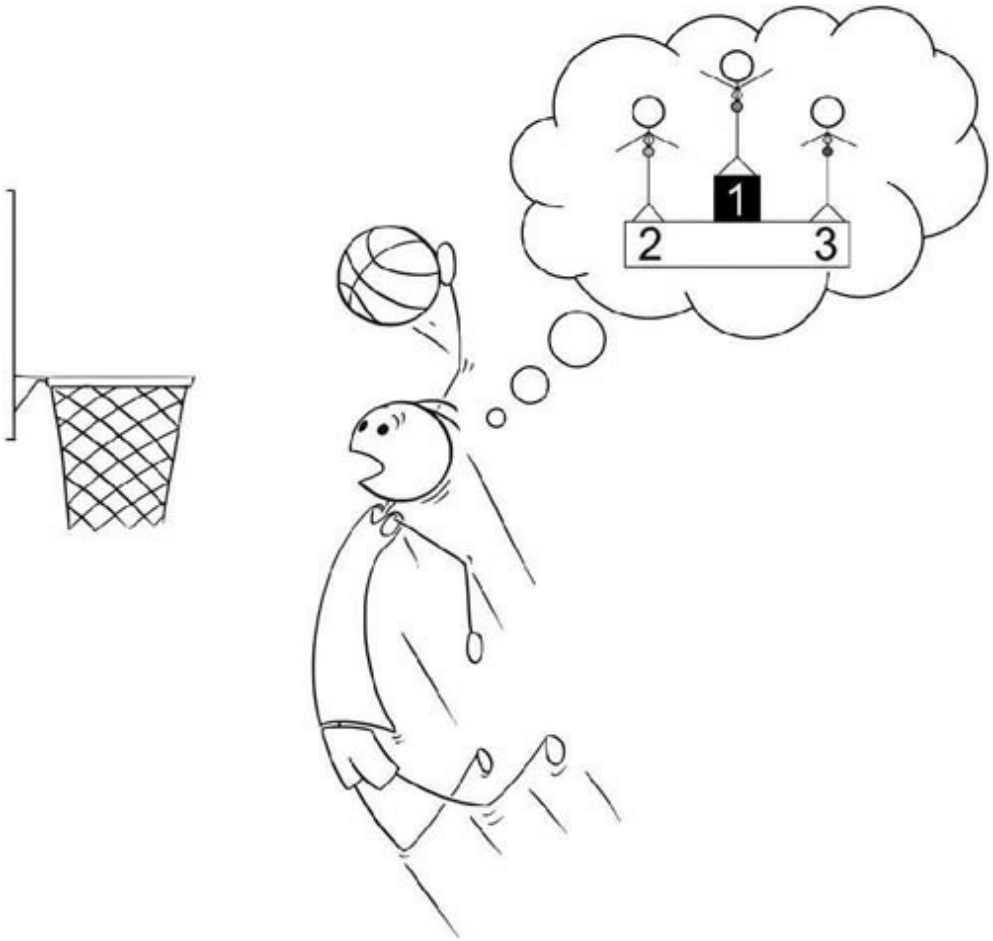


When you use the endowed progress effect, you make it easier to be consistent with your intentions. Anything you can do to help reduce the perceived amount of work to be done and give yourself a head start (or even the illusion of a head start) is going to encourage and motivate you.

LEARNING HOW TO EXPECT SUCCESS

Winners either start out being optimistic or learn to be optimistic; either way, they know they are not going to become a champion by being negative and pessimistic. Optimism is a feeling you create for yourself. Positive expectancy is a form of optimism. But expectancy goes beyond positive thinking or blind optimism. It's *justified optimism*. Expecting success, by itself, won't make you win a race or conquer a mountain; but without it, you won't maintain the determination to see the end result. Justified optimism gives you the incentive to persevere so you can build the necessary skills and confidence. You know how it feels to succeed, and you bring that to everything you do.

At the beginning of the 1999–2000 college basketball season, on the very first day of practice, head coach Tom Izzo of the Michigan State Spartans put a ladder under the basketball hoop. He then handed out a pair of scissors and asked each player to snip at the net —a ritual that is ceremoniously performed by the winners of the national championship. The Michigan State Spartans won the championship that year.



It's hard to achieve something great if you don't expect to win. *What Makes Winners Win* by Charlie Jones shares the story of elite swimmer John Naber. Reflecting on winning the silver medal at the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal, Naber said, "I wonder that if I had merely put myself in a state of mind where I was 'going for the gold,' if I had been more focused, if I had expected wonderful things out of myself in that pool, then could I not have been just three-tenths of a second faster and thereby have won the gold medal?"

While positive expectancy won't guarantee success, research shows that thinking negatively has almost a perfect correlation with failure. That's why champions refuse to let doubt and fear make them succumb to negativity. Winners know that without optimism they will not achieve as lofty a goal. When they miss or fail, they shift their focus to what they need to do and how it feels to succeed. They see challenges and high-pressure situations as opportunities for success; others see risk of failure. In his book *I Only Talk Winning*, legendary boxing trainer and cornerman Angelo Dundee wrote, "In life there are positive and negative thoughts. And hey, it doesn't cost you a cent more to think positively."

CREATING THE EXPECTANCY OF A WINNER

With this understanding of expectancy, how can you use it to build a winning mindset and achieve your goals? The answer: proximity. An example of this phenomenon is marathon runners, who generally run the last mile faster than most of the 25 miles preceding it. Theoretically, runners should be the slowest at the very end of a marathon—they're tired and probably feeling depleted. Yet they consistently run that last portion faster, because they know they've almost reached their goal.

It's the same for you, no matter what you're striving to achieve. If you can see the finish line, literally or figuratively, you are more likely to make a final push and summon hidden reserves to reach it. This principle, combined with the endowed progress, underscores the importance of keeping track of your progress and making sure you acknowledge each of your accomplishments, no matter how small. This will help you emphasize how far away from "zero" you already are. You're already on your way!

According to researchers at the University of Rhode Island, whether you think you can achieve a goal has a big effect on whether you actually do. If people think they don't have the ability to win, their motivation will be low because they have low expectancy. **Peak performers cultivate the ability to draw on the emotions of previous successes, which activates a positive chain reaction of success drivers such as confidence, self-esteem, and positive expectancy.**

Most people remember their mistakes and failures more than their successes. In fact, some people deny that they have past experiences of success to draw from. Yet almost everyone has past accomplishments to build on—moments when they were at their personal best. These experiences may or may not be in the same field or context. But the exact content is not as important as the quality of the experience that comes from knowing you have done something well. The source can be anything—for example, winning a spelling bee back when you were in grade school, or scoring a touchdown during a junior high football game, or simply knowing that you were a wonderful parent to your children. Once again, it's not the specifics that matter, but the quality of the feelings and emotions. That's what's important!

REVISITING MOMENTS OF PAST SUCCESS

To create an expectation of success, you must revisit vivid mental images from your past and relive the emotions of your achievements. For some of you, it may be difficult at first to restore the images and feelings of success to their original vividness, but try it. Ultimately, you want to make it a part of your regular mental routine, especially when faced with something challenging. With some work and practice, it will become a habit.

Allow me to share some moments of coaching my daughter through this process. I can remember the first time my daughter rode her bicycle without training wheels. She kept saying to me, "Daddy, I can't ride without training wheels. I'm scared."

I replied, "Great! That fear is going to help you focus and keep you on the bike. You know, at one time you couldn't walk—and now you can run!"

We set up cones in front of our house, and I worked with her for about 30 minutes, focusing on making incremental progress. I held onto her and the bike, then let go for a few seconds—then a few more. Suddenly, I let go completely. "Daddy! Daddy!" my daughter screamed. "I'm riding my bike all by myself!" It was a wonderful moment, one I'm sure any parent would cherish.

Later I used this past experience to create mental proximity when she was unsure about auditioning to sing the National Anthem for her fifth-grade graduation ceremony. I told her to remember when she rode her bike for the first time. "How did that feel to succeed?" I asked her. "You didn't let fear stop you then, and you did it."

"Yeah, you're right!" she replied excitedly.

A month later, my wife and I watched our daughter sing the National Anthem at her graduation in front of hundreds of students, parents, and faculty members. She had made it all the way to the final audition and won.

More recently, my daughter started playing soccer and had not made a goal in two seasons. "I'm never going to make a goal. I'm just not good enough," she moaned in frustration during the ride home one day.

Once again, I reminded her of her past successes: riding the bike, beating the competition and singing the National Anthem in front of hundreds of people. “You said the same thing before. But you practiced and figured it out, and you did it.” Then off to the soccer field we went.

I explained to her that it had nothing to do with her lack of ability; she needed to forget about the result and learn how to execute the right process, just like when she learned to ride her bike through incremental improvement. We worked on moving to the correct spot on the field, communicating to her teammates, and calling for the ball when she had an open shot. Two games later, she made her first goal, and her team won the playoffs that day.

As these examples show, small wins parlay into bigger victories over a lifetime of accomplishments. It’s a process of building confidence and skills. We all have these stories within us, memories of when we conquered a challenge or overcame a fear. Recalling these experiences with vivid memories and emotional content can propel you across the finish line of the next goal you want to achieve.

PERFECTING THE POWER OF DISCIPLINED IMAGINATION

As we’ve discussed this far, expectations are created in your mind. Succeeding is the best way to expect future success. But even *before* you perform a particular task, you can generate the expectation of success in your imagination. Try this exercise:

First, put yourself in a deeply relaxed state. Find a quiet place during a time when you will not be disturbed. Start with some deep breathing for 5 or 10 minutes: in through your nose and out through your mouth. Once relaxed, take the following steps:

1. **Mentally go back to a time when you did something extraordinary well.** Find a time when you *felt* succe This may be something from your recent past or as far back as your childhood. It may be the memory of an at event or of something you accomplished in your work, at home, recreationally, or in school.
2. **Close your eyes and put yourself completely into the memory.** How did you feel? Relive the excitemen emotion as if you were experiencing it for the first time. Recall as much detail as you can: sight, sound, taste, sm everything you experienced. Focus specifically on your emotions. Let yourself experience them again.
3. **Take a deep breath.** Hold it for five seconds; then exhale slowly, evenly, and fully. This will help you rela focus deeper. Now relive your memory of success again. Allow yourself to intensify any emotions and enlarg experience in your mind. Repeat the process: Take deep breaths, focus, feel the emotions, and intensify the feelin experience of success.

Do this uninterrupted for at least 10 to 15 minutes. Over time, you can work up to 30-minute sessions. Focus on images and play “movies” in your head of those positive past experiences and really concentrate on your feelings associated with those experiences. Bring

in as many senses to the image as possible: What did you hear, smell, feel? Use it all!

This will help you become more in touch with the feelings you had when you were at your best. Soon you will learn how to stop dwelling on past failures and instead learn how to draw power and confidence from your past successes, recalling them on demand. You may find that you've diminished your past victories (you tell yourself, "Oh, that wasn't such a big deal after all . . ."). But at the time those accomplishments were huge! Recall those feelings now and use them to empower yourself.

HAVE A SELECTIVE MEMORY

While self-reflection is helpful, dwelling on your problems, past mistakes, and misfortunes only magnifies negative emotions and engrains bad experiences. Perhaps you replay a poor performance over and over in your head, and each time you envision it, you beat yourself up. As you rehash those painful times, your self-confidence plummets and hopelessness soars. If people treat you badly or you have a really bad experience, you may remember it for the rest of your life. It is one of the key evolutionary functions to keep us alive. As a result, it's very common for people to relive negative experiences. This is how negative expectancy is created—but not by elite performers!

Champions know that mentally replaying the same scene over and over increases the chances of reexperiencing it in real life. Winners choose to remember their successes and conveniently "forget" their failures. Some people ask, "What about building your weaknesses and keeping accurate records of all your performances?" Champions are only interested in empowering themselves and winning. The goal is to remember things in ways that will build your confidence and empower you to perform at your very best. It's not that they don't analyze what went wrong and work to correct mistakes and build up weaknesses. They know how to take in feedback, make adjustments, and engage in "perfect practice," as we'll discuss in Part 2.

Most important, they minimize the mental space that failures occupy, and they reserve more space for their victories. The lesson here is to remember and savor the good experiences and the great performances to increase the likelihood of repeating a winning performance.

HAVE YOU MADE THE ULTIMATE PLEDGE?

Just because you make a commitment to be great at something doesn't mean you will produce wonderful results right away. Would you walk into a courtroom after a few months of law school and argue a case with little or no experience? If you did, would you be surprised if you lost? Or would you attempt to perform surgery having attended only two premed classes? If you did—heaven forbid—would you be surprised if the patient wasn't cured? These scenarios, of course, seem utterly ridiculous. Yet some people will go out and buy a tennis racket or a set of golf clubs or open a stock trading account and expect great results right away. And when success doesn't come easily, they make excuses and give up. Rarely do they admit to needing specialized knowledge and skill, along with the time and patience to develop both.

I was a terrible stock investor when I first started my trading career; for years my results were mediocre at best. But I understood the power of persistence. The success I eventually achieved didn't come from natural talent or a lucky break; it came from my willingness to make the ultimate commitment—an unconditional pledge to persevere.

Unconditional commitment is like unconditional love; you do it with devotion regardless of what comes back to you. Without committing to unconditional persistence, you are already

half the distance to quitting. You are saying to yourself, “I’ll do this as long as the pain doesn’t become too much.” Can you imagine if an Olympic athlete had such an attitude? I can assure you he or she wouldn’t become a gold medalist.

Those who succeed big at anything all have the same attitude: They keep going until it happens or die trying. Quitting is simply not an option. Super-successful people all share this level of commitment. If you don’t go all in with that attitude, you will very likely give up when the going gets tough. Something will always come up that knocks you off track and makes you feel like quitting. But with the ultimate commitment, you won’t succumb to the temptation to stop. You’ll persist until you achieve your goal.

It’s remarkable what you can accomplish if you just don’t stop and keep learning. Knowledge and skill can be acquired through study and practice, but nothing great comes to those who quit. Champions take pride in their willingness to persist, knowing that’s a key quality that separates them from the average performer. By pledging your allegiance to unconditional persistence, you are not average; you are exceptional. As a result, you will experience a level of development that cannot and will not be denied.

BURN THE SHIPS

The phrase “burning the ships” means there is no turning back to old habits and ways. It originated in 1519, when Hernán Cortés set sail to the “new world” with his men. Upon arrival in what is now Veracruz, Mexico, Cortés’s men became weary and scared. They wanted to return home to their old life. Cortés is said to have ordered his men to burn their ships, leaving no option but to press on. The burning of those ships represented much more than a separation from old ways—it enabled them to complete their mission. Admittedly, Cortés has been both idealized and condemned, but that’s not the point here. It’s about cutting off the escape route and taking away the net. There was no more going back.

After I quit school and started pursuing stock trading, people would always ask me, “Doesn’t it concern you that you have nothing to fall back on if this stock thing doesn’t work out?” To that I replied, “Not at all; that’s precisely why I’m going to make sure it works out, because I’ve given myself no other option.”

In this world we wrestle with all kinds of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual battles. To allow great change in our lives, we must find the root of those struggles. We need to find our own ships that are so tempting to sail back on to what was comfortable and familiar—and burn them.

SMALL SUCCESS LEADS TO BIG SUCCESS

More people want success faster and faster. It’s what I call the “Veruca Salt syndrome.” Remember Veruca, from the movie *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*? She was the second Golden Ticket winner, portrayed as a pretty little girl but the epitome of a rich, spoiled little brat. She is probably remembered for saying, “Give it to me now” and “I want it now.”

You will never build something truly magnificent or become really great at something if you go in with the attitude of wanting it now. Olympic gymnasts don’t start off doing backflips on the balance beam. Instead, they start out on a beam only a few inches off the floor. They work up to building the skill and confidence to execute amazing aerial feats on a four-inch bar, four feet off the floor.

From small steps, incredible journeys can be accomplished. David Goggins went from weighing 300 pounds to becoming a physically fit Navy SEAL and running 200 miles in one

continuous 39-hour stretch. When asked how he became so disciplined, Goggins replied, "It started out, honestly, with recognizing that my bedroom was dirty and my bed wasn't made. It started with doing small house chores."

That's why it is so important to learn to build on success and leverage small tasks to conquer larger ones. As humans, we are constantly estimating the odds that our choices will get us to where we want to be. **If we look at the top of a mountain without thinking about the steps to get there, it could seem so daunting, we may not even try. But if we can see ourselves, step-by-step, climbing to the first base camp, we can see ourselves climbing to the second and so on.** When we string all that together, we start to envision reaching the top. We become increasingly confident as our expectation grows.

But none of that will ever happen if we overwhelm ourselves with trying to achieve a huge goal in one leap, or if we fail to break down a large task into individual parts, distinct stages, or smaller duties. This is the power of incremental progress, which creates momentum. It creates self-confidence, and it's all about expectancy and managing your perception of what it takes to perform and succeed.

Small decisions lead to big decisions, and small successes lead to bigger successes. Understanding this concept plays an important role in your expectations and is key to helping you stay the course. **Most people don't fail because they lack potential; they fail because they lose confidence in their ability and they give up.** Winners have vision and can see where they want to end up. They break down challenges into manageable chunks. They then leverage each step into a bigger step in the direction of their main goal. Accomplishing their short-term goals keeps them on track in the pursuit of their long-term vision. They understand the power of achieving incremental progress and leveraging their efforts. This is another way of creating proximity to your goal.

THE COMMITMENT SCALE

Remarkable performance doesn't happen by accident; it is always preceded by commitment. So we return to where we began this chapter. You know that expectancy is a key driver of persistence. Now it's time to reflect again on *your l*evel of commitment. Before you make a decision to make a new commitment—playing a sport, starting a business, writing a book—let's examine your own level of determination. I break down commitment into four stages:

STAGE 1—Participating. At this level of commitment (if you can even call it a "commitment"), you enjoy yourself. Having a good time is your main goal. But if your activities or endeavors entail too much work or stop being fun, you're likely to quit, because you're only committed to enjoyment without putting in much effort to improve or perfect a skill. Young children rarely start anywhere except Stage 1. They want to have fun. If they are not enjoying something and it becomes serious work, they don't want to do it for very long.

STAGE 2—Learning. Everyone starts off at the learning stage. You're just getting involved in a sport or activity; maybe it's something you've been having fun with, and now you're ready to be more serious about learning the correct fundamentals. Or maybe it's something totally new. Starting from the beginning automatically puts you in the learning stage. In this initial stage, mastering the basics is important. If you don't master the basics or at least get exposure to the correct way to approach a task or endeavor, you will have difficulty moving to the next level because you'll have a weak foundation.

STAGE 3—Competing. At this stage, you're more deeply involved. You want to be good enough to be a respected competitor. Maybe you've even entered some competitions or

performed on stage, and you understand that this is a different level of engagement. You develop a training routine and establish some disciplined guidelines to follow. You're likely working with a coach and practicing on a regular basis with the intention to improve.

STAGE 4—Winning. At this stage, your goal is not just to be competitive, but to win. You want to be best in class or, at least, the best you can be. You are willing to put everything on the line to be the best at something. This is the greatest level of commitment. You aren't just in it for fun or even to be competitive; you're in it to win it! You're already working regularly with a good coach, and now you take it to the next level. You practice "by the clock," when you're scheduled to practice—even if you're tried, stressed, frustrated, or distracted. You don't just practice when you feel like it. You clear your mind and mind your commitments. You're all in.

You can start at any of the four stages, including going right to Stage 4 with the intention to win. But most people get interested or involved in something at Stage 1 or 2. Very few make it all the way to Stage 4 with a real commitment to win. That's why the world is full of wannabes, but very few real competitors and even fewer champions.

What's your level of commitment?

THE BIG QUESTION

Now that you've determined your level of commitment, ask yourself one very important question: "Does my participation level equal my goal?" If your goal is to be an Olympic gold medalist, but your participation level is training to learn or to be competitive, you're probably in for a big disappointment. As with many things, congruency is important. Your beliefs, goals, thoughts, and actions must all be aligned—in harmony and calibrated to each other. **If your commitment is less than your expectancy, either your goal needs to be set lower or you need to step up your level of commitment.**

When I started my first Wall Street business, I partnered with my good friend Steve. I sat him down and told him, "I plan on being the best in the world at what I do, and that may take longer than we estimate. Before we start this business together, I want to make sure we're on the same page and we are not going into this with a deadline. As far as I'm concerned, we persist until we succeed. Quitting is not an option!"

I looked at him: "Are you in?" I asked.

That's Stage 4 commitment—and the rest is history.

GOING BEYOND CONVENIENT

When you are unconditionally committed, you do what it takes to be outstanding. An example is how you decide to work with a coach. Someone at Stage 2 or 3 who is practicing to learn or compete may look for a coach close to home since convenience is part of the equation. But when your commitment level is at Stage 4, which is practicing with the intention to win, you want the best coach, not the most convenient. You travel as far as you need to go to get the best training and guidance. You go beyond convenience!

When I was body building in my twenties, I developed a very rigorous scheduled routine. People usually think the toughest part of body building is the weight training. But the really challenging part is the eating discipline. Back then, I ate seven times a day. I started my day with 12 egg whites, a bowl of oatmeal, water, and supplements. I had six more meals during the day consisting of four to eight ounces of boiled chicken, beef, or fish, with steamed

vegetables and rice, followed by more egg whites and a spoonful of peanut butter before bed. I did my stretching and warm-up routine and went to the gym daily. I maintained that schedule for years.

The only way I could manage that level of commitment with the diet and training was to have a process and adhere to a schedule with unwavering discipline. I had a Casio watch with an alarm that went off every two hours. When the alarm sounded, I followed the meal plan that my nutritional coach outlined for me. I didn't eat when it was convenient or even when I was hungry. I ate by the clock.

That's the kind of all-in, unwavering commitment you need at Stage 4 as you prepare and practice to win. **With unconditional persistence, you don't waver when the going gets tough. Instead of letting your commitment weaken, you "re-up" to the challenge and recommit. You go back to your original reason for making the commitment—your "why."**

If your why for losing 40 pounds is to look better than anybody else at your high school reunion, that's not going to sustain you and create lasting change. But if your why is to be healthy, reduce your risk of diabetes, extend your life expectancy, and be alive to see your daughter get married and have children, these goals are meaningful and can keep you going. It's all about your level of commitment. If the purpose behind your commitment is strong enough, you will stay the course.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE GIVING UP

I'm always asked, "How did you make it through all those years of trial and error with little or no progress. What kept you going?" It was all about how I perceived "spent resources." Some people look at six years of not getting to their goal as failure and feel like success is never going to happen. They lose faith, and they quit. I took the opposite view: I looked at every year as one year closer to my goal. Each day that passed made me even more convinced that if I quit, I'd miss out on the success that was right around the corner. The more time that went by, the more I thought to myself, "I must be getting close."

I used spent resources as a motivator, always looking forward, not behind. I mentally employed the endowed progress effect and always imagined incremental gains in proximity to my goal. Instead of losing my resolve, I intensified my commitment.

If you want to accomplish a big goal, that's the way you must think, because a big goal usually takes longer to achieve than you originally estimated. The mediocre performer sees a poor start as a reason to give up. The winner sees it as an opportunity to come back and finish strong. **If you don't see opportunity in adversity and embrace it as part of the process of succeeding, then setbacks will always be your excuse for not reaching your goal.** If you are too focused on results, you will always be disappointed. But when you focus on the process and mentally create proximity to your goal, you are preparing for opportunity, and you will be ready to take full advantage of it when it arrives.

DEALING WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

If you have a poor performance—maybe you came in eighth place when you planned on coming in first—you will probably feel terrible and maybe even beat up on yourself. But to spend lots of time in feelings of regret and thoughts like "I should have . . . ," "I could have . . . ," "If only I had . . . ," "I'm no good . . . ," once again, that's not what winners do!

Research shows that dwelling on past failures can send the mind into a helpless state, and as a result, you are not able to get motivated for subsequent performances. I give myself no

more than a few minutes (and certainly no more than a day) to feel lousy—to kick and scream, cry, or whatever. It's just enough time to let out my frustration and release some steam and grieve over my poor performance. But that's it! Then I refocus my mind and my emotions back to the process of becoming a winner. The key is to stay in touch with the real motivator: your love for the craft, the process, and the journey. That's the eternal flame. When you screw up, go ahead and feel as terrible as you want to feel and embrace the disappointment—but *only for a moment.* Then get your butt back to work.

When you feel like giving up, realize that at that very moment, you are at the same fork in the road that everyone eventually faces. If you quit, you are being just like every other coward who takes the easy way out and chooses to give up. As Hall of Fame baseball starter Tony Gwynn put it, "It's easy to cheat yourself and do just enough to get by, but that's what everybody can do."

If you don't take control over your emotions, your emotions are going to control you. When in despair, ask yourself, "Who is in charge here—me or this crappy feeling trying to make me act like a loser and quit?" Then tell yourself, "In this very moment, my decision is literally shaping my destiny." Finally, contemplate the question, "What would a champion do here?"

That's your answer.

YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT!

Over the years of studying top performers and helping to develop more than a few myself, I've come to the conclusion that the problem isn't lack of ability. As Henry Ford said, "There is no man living who isn't capable of doing more than he thinks he can do." People can do much more than they are currently doing.

The problem is that most people simply lack or lose faith in their own ability, and that makes them give up before they get the chance to discover what they can be really great at. They underestimate themselves, so when things take longer than they expected (another underestimation), they quit or set it up so they fail. Then they prove themselves "right." They tell themselves, "I really didn't have what it takes," "It wasn't meant to be," or "I didn't really want it anyway." That is just B.S.—just like all excuses. Find your passion.

There is a saying (often credited to Albert Einstein): "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." The question I have for you at this point of our journey together is, "What is your genius?"

What's "meant to be" is what you make happen. If you really want something bad enough and you're willing to work for it, you can become a top competitor and even become a champion. It takes commitment and courage, which you *do* have within you. It's your job to reach down inside and find what it takes and then create your own expectancy.

It's challenging because you'll think you're risking your ego and your pride. Your self-image might suffer a bruise. Your self-esteem takes a hit if you put it all on the line and not achieve the results you want right away. The road to success can be long and painful.

Don't let the setbacks get you off track. The law of detachment reminds you that becoming too attached to any outcome—whether a particular goal or even a particular person—can ruin your life. You become desperate, and you clutch and cling. Detach from the result and remind yourself that the current condition is only temporary, just part of the process. You will get there because you are committed to putting one foot in front of the other until you win. Success is the only option.

Thomas Edison was quoted as saying, "Many of life's failures are people who didn't realize how close they were to success when they gave up." So many people give up just before they reach the summit (literal or metaphoric). They can't see that if they just persist,

they can go the distance. When you face the tough times, recommit! Let the vision of your dream drive you to the finish line. The process is the real work and the real reward. Embrace every aspect of the journey, the failures and the wins, with equal enthusiasm. This is how you make mountains into molehills.

You made the ultimate pledge, which means you can't fail. As Robert Greene wrote in his book *Mastery*, "Eventually, you will hit upon a particular field, niche, or opportunity that suits you perfectly. You will recognize it when you find it because it will spark that childlike sense of wonder and excitement; it will feel right. Once found, everything will fall into place."

But don't mistake Greene's stirring words for a magic wand. This does not happen automatically. It takes commitment and persistence. It's all about your expectancy—and you are in the process of becoming a champion. Expect wonderful things.

CHAPTER 5

THE MOMENT OF DECISION

The only person you are destined to become is the one you decide to be.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Right now, in an instant, you can change everything. You have the authority, a single force. It's a God-given gift that you, like every other human, has been granted to control the quality of your life. It's the power of choice. Although you can't control people or events, you can choose what you think, what you do, and what things mean to you. These three decisions ultimately shape your destiny and beyond.

Consider this: You leave the house five minutes later than normal, and you avoid a collision that would have caused a fatal accident on the highway. The person who would have died in that accident, had you left on time, goes on to have a child who grows up to become president of the United States. That president makes some very important decisions and avoids a global nuclear war that would end life as we know it. Your seemingly insignificant decision to leave five minutes later than normal saves humanity!

Could this happen? Yes, it's happening right now! It's called the "butterfly effect." As the saying goes, a butterfly flaps its wings somewhere in the world and a typhoon happens over the Pacific. Every decision you make is important. When you make a change, positive or negative, you're not the only one impacted; your decisions affect those around you, and even those not around you. The butterfly effect extends well beyond what you imagine.

In one of Stephen King's greatest works, *11/22/63*, a young man named Jake discovers a portal in a diner's pantry that leads back to 1958. Jake gets a brilliant idea and presumes that altering history could change the world for the better. He decides to live in the past until 1963 to prevent the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, believing that this change will greatly benefit humanity. After years of stalking Lee Harvey Oswald, Jake manages to prevent him from shooting Kennedy. Upon returning to the present, he expects to find the world improved as a result. Instead, the opposite has happened. Earthquakes occur everywhere, his old home is in ruins, and nuclear war has destroyed much of the world. Distraught, Jake returns to 1958 once again and resets history. What this shows us is things don't occur only in isolation. Events can serve as catalysts and change-agents. The decisions we make have a greater impact beyond what we can currently see or would ever guess.

Now let's examine it in reverse. If you look back five, ten, or twenty years, you will find some key decisions that shaped your life, some good and some bad. For some people, a particular decision landed them a great job, resulted in their starting or ending a relationship, or perhaps created a life-changing opportunity. For others, their decisions landed them in prison or worse. That's the power of choice. **As you think back, are there some key decisions you made that, if they had been made differently, would result in you living a totally different life today?**

Decision is the ultimate personal power. You have choices: what to believe, what you focus on, how you perceive events, and how you respond. Those choices create your world.

In life, we are constantly being presented with forks in the road. At each of these critical decision-making junctures, your personal history is being written—and perhaps much more.

The decisions you make right now are shaping your future. And while you can't be perfect in every decision you make, you can make quality choices that support you becoming the best you can be. To do that, you need to start by understanding what drives your decisions.

PAIN AND PLEASURE—ASSIGNING MEANING

Life is a series of decisions, big and small. Some are routine, such as what you decided to have for breakfast this morning. Others are more momentous: changing jobs, buying a new house, taking a relationship to the next level, pursuing a dream. For some people, decisions are a process of information gathering, weighing pros and cons. For others, it's pure agony—first comes the panic, then the paralysis. Many people fear making a wrong decision so much, they choose instead to become paralyzed and not make any decision. But that's like driving a car and refusing to apply the brakes when the road curves.

I have a friend—let's call him "Dave"—who was dating someone for a while, and things were going well. He and "Mary" really did seem perfect for each other, but anytime the subject of marriage came up, Dave froze. He wasn't unhappy in his relationship, and he didn't seem interested in being with anyone else except Mary. He just couldn't bring himself to make the decision to commit.

"Marriage! I get nervous opening a Netflix account—even that seems like a big decision to me," he said to me.

I appreciated Dave's honesty and self-awareness. And he's not alone. Just reading this, you might be squirming, thinking about your own difficulty in making decisions and commitments. So why is decision making so difficult?

Every decision we make, everything we do, is the result of seeking pleasure or avoiding pain. These same forces motivate every human being. While human beings want to avoid pain and gain pleasure, it's a little more complicated than that. As it turns out, avoiding immediate pain is much more motivating than gaining immediate pleasure. Numerous studies have demonstrated that people will do much more to avoid pain than they will to gain pleasure. As a result, fear of making the wrong decision leads people to avoid making any decisions, rather than going after something they desire. They're just too afraid of making a bad decision.

When you decide, you commit to something, at least initially, and commitment is a perceived fear for many people. The word "decide" comes from the Latin *decider*, which literally means "to cut off" all other possibilities. That sounds scary to a lot of people! To them, "cutting off" other options sounds like giving something up, instead of growing into something more meaningful. It all depends on two words, "pain" and "pleasure."

Every part of your psyche is influenced in some way by the pain-pleasure principle. In fact, your beliefs, your values, the actions you take, and the habits you indulge in are all built upon this principle. Who you are today is the result of how you have interpreted and acted on experiences of pain and pleasure in your life.

The good news is it's really the *perception* of pain and pleasure that drives people, not the actual pain or pleasure. This is a very empowering truth, because we have control over what things mean to us. **The secret to motivation is the meaning you assign to what is painful and what is pleasurable. We all have that ability; yet most of us fail to make good use of this incredible power.**

A perfect example is my stock trading. In the business of speculation, you must manage risk against potential reward because every investment decision is based on probabilities, not

absolute certainties. When I first started in the business, I did not yet fully understand the importance of the pain-pleasure principle and how it related to my success as a trader. I considered losses in my trading account to be very negative and very painful—failures I should avoid at all costs. I told myself that being really good at trading must mean losing as few times as possible.

Then I learned that all traders experience losses. Even the most successful stock investors have just as many losing trades as they have winning trades; having losing trades is unavoidable. Although stock traders have no direct control over how many times they win or lose, they do have control over *how much* they lose. Successful traders manage those losses, keeping the dollar amount of their losses to a relatively low level, so that losses are smaller than the gains they achieve.

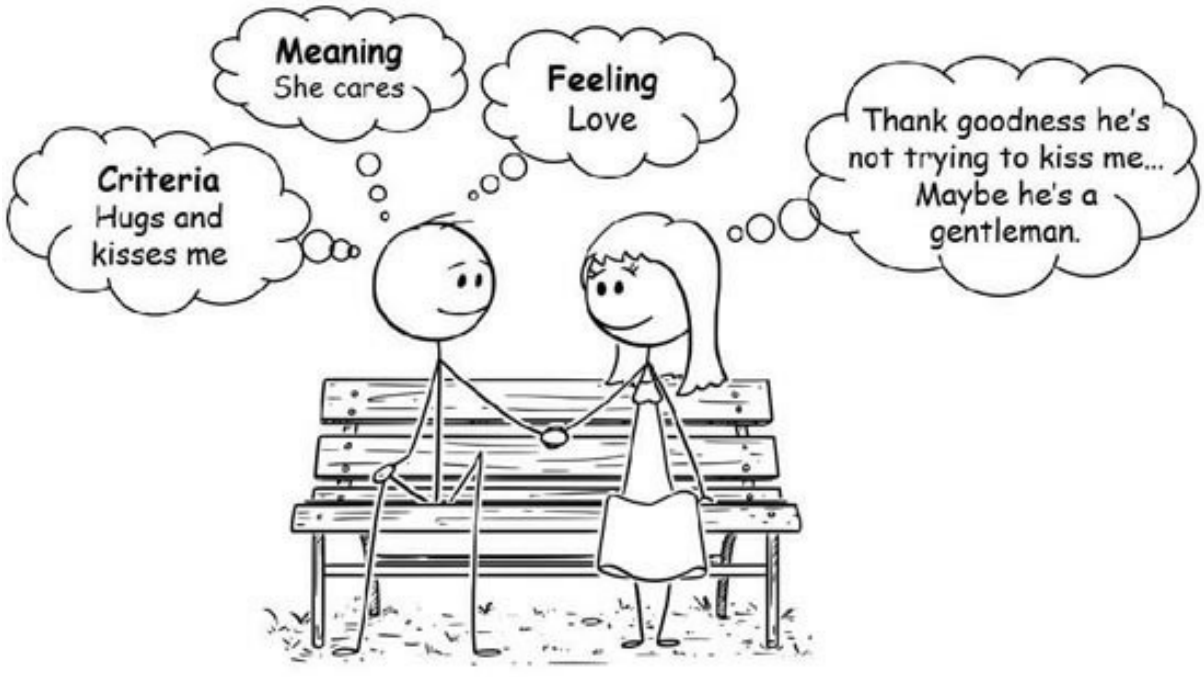
That was my "aha!" moment: I had to adopt a new perspective.

Previously, I had assigned pain to losing—period. So whether I had a small or moderate-size loss, I tried to avoid the pain of selling and taking the loss in hopes of hanging on until the trade got back to profitability where the pleasure was. This faulty mindset led me to hold stubbornly onto small losses, which eventually turned into even bigger losses, sucking money from my wins and undermining my risk management plan.

With my new understanding, I began to assign pleasure to sticking to my discipline and taking small losses to protect my capital, and I associated a great amount of pain with large losses. With this new thinking, I could see small losses as an opportunity to avoid larger, more destructive losses. This enabled me to manage my risk in relation to my reward and maintain a profitable edge in my trading. It was a major turning point in my career. And it all happened by shifting my perception of pain and pleasure.

Two people can have the same experience, and yet one person perceives it as pleasurable and the other person sees it as painful. It's our associations that make the difference. Everything we do happens as a result of how we perceive pain and pleasure. For

example, one person may see a failed relationship as the end of happiness, while someone else may perceive the same circumstance as an opportunity to finally find the perfect soulmate. These emotions don't just materialize by accident. They start by deciding what you want those feelings to represent.



"First Date"

Any circumstance can serve us or hinder us, depending on how we decide to interpret events and the meaning we assign to them. You decide the criteria that need to be met to feel a certain way, because you decide the meaning of those criteria. The Malagasy people of Madagascar have a famous ritual called "famadihana," or "the turning of the bones." Once every five or seven years, a family celebrates in its ancestral crypt where the bodies, wrapped in cloth, are exhumed and sprayed with wine or perfume. As a band plays at the lively event, family members dance with the dead bodies. For some, it's a chance to pass family news to the deceased and ask for their blessings; for others, it's a time to remember and tell stories. It's a huge joyous celebration, and sadness is not even allowed.

This may seem extreme, but it demonstrates a powerful point: When pain-pleasure perceptions shift, we make entirely different decisions, and our experiences, and even our emotions, shift. More importantly, it doesn't just happen; we get to decide what things mean to us. Perception is a potent intellectual tool for dealing with life. As things change, so can your perception and the way you respond. The ability to choose is your personal power! You must decide what you associate with pain and what you connect to pleasure. As you regulate your perception of your experiences, you'll define your own happiness.

DON'T FIGHT FORCES—USE THEM

When I was 26 years old, my father died unexpectedly. I will never forget the phone call at four in the morning: "Mark, your Dad just suffered a massive heart attack." He was only 57. I never considered the possibility of him not being around. It was the most traumatic event of my life. I felt so crushed by his loss; it was like the entire planet had rolled over me.

In my eyes, Dad was Superman. How could this happen?

My father was my rock in times of crisis. He helped me get over massive anxiety attacks that plagued me as a teenager. Dad told me that, instead of trying to be macho, I had to "go with it!" He opened my eyes so I could see that the more I tried to fight it, the more that energy would bottle up inside, building pressure and strengthening.

I'll never forget his words: "That anxiety is like a storm that wants to make landfall—so, let it! If you have to yell and scream, run until you're exhausted, or punch the heavy bag until your hands bleed, then go do that, but don't let that energy build pressure; direct it."

Suddenly I realized that I could channel my energy. As I expressed those anxious feelings and embraced the "storm," I became empowered.

Ironically, Dad's advice is what helped me deal with his death. When he passed, I was so angry—at the doctors, at God, and even at Dad for not taking better care of himself. I was angry at whoever was responsible for taking my father and not allowing him to see me become a success.

Then one day I realized that this man was not coming back. I had a choice to make. I could let my anger and anguish destroy me and make me bitter. Or I could take that energy and use it like a laser beam, channel it in a productive direction. Because where focus goes, energy flows. In his honor, I could become the person I wanted to be, knowing that Dad would have been proud of me. By using that energy, he was actually a part of it.

This started a major turnaround and propelled the trajectory of my success. I focused on improving myself and becoming as healthy as I could physically, mentally, and spiritually. I made the decision to become a great stock trader, and the success I have experienced resulted directly from this time in my life. Every day, I told myself that whatever I did was in memory of my dad. I used the pain from his passing as a source of motivation and converted the energy into pleasure and satisfaction. Instead of giving up because of my broken heart, I redirected my emotions toward more positive outcomes.

My father's death made me live more fully into my potential, and everything I have achieved is a direct result of having changed my perception. Dad's passing turned out to be one of those valuable "teachers" in disguise.

To be clear, I didn't turn the pain of my father's death into pleasure. Rather, I changed the meaning of what the pain represented. I reinterpreted my feelings and emotions so that instead of seeing them as crippling, they could be empowering.

My story is not the only one. American speed skater Dan Jansen entered the 1988 Winter Olympics as the favorite for his event. However, on the morning of the 500-meter race, he received a call from his mother, informing him that his sister was dying and wanted to say goodbye. Four hours later, he received another call; his sister had died. Dan had made a promise to win gold for her. He did not win a medal that year, but Dan was fueled by the promise he made to his dying sister. He never quit and eventually went on the set a new world record.

Ask yourself: "What energy from the past am I stubbornly holding onto? What emotions am I tying up, worrying about things that haven't happened yet? What am I fighting? Where and how could I redirect that energy in a positive and productive manner?"

The more we blame our circumstances, or we live in the past, the more negative and compromised our energy is likely to be. The more we take responsibility for the energy we bring to the world, the more empowered we become. The minute we change our minds and stop giving power to the past, the past and the pain that goes with it, loses its power over us. The key is not to fight your anxiety or fear and let it paralyze you, but to recognize it as energy, a resource to be utilized.

THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION YOU WILL MAKE

Every day, all day, you're making decisions. Most of them are minor; you chose to do this instead of that. Then there are the decisions that are potentially life-changing, e.g., ending an old habit like smoking or starting a new one like exercising and eating healthily. For most people, there are many more potential decisions that never get made. These are the things they think they could or should do but never really get around to doing. The reason? They have never reached that critical point of "deciding to decide."

Of all the decisions that you make in your life, the most important one is making the decision to decide. This is the point at which you finally pull the trigger and take the step that you've been contemplating. Until you decide to decide, you lack the commitment to change. Maybe you're not sick and tired enough, or maybe you still need to hit rock bottom, which will force you to make that decision. Some people have to reach the point of being sick and tired of being sick and tired! Or you finally reach the point where you want something so badly, you can't stand one more minute of not having it in your life. Even though you've tried and tried in the past to attain this goal, you tell yourself, "This is it, I am no longer contemplating a decision. Today I've decided to decide!"

Many years ago, when I was a teenager, I started smoking cigarettes. Peer pressure is a strong force when you're young and impressionable, and everyone around me was smoking—it's what you did when you were trying to look cool. Eventually, as I got more serious about competitive fighting and knowing how unhealthy smoking is, I realized I needed to stop. I'd quit for a few weeks, but then I'd feel like I was losing my mind from the nicotine withdrawal and go back to smoking. This went on until, finally, I decided to decide.

I had heard Tony Robbins say, "When you make a decision, a real decision, change happens in an instant." One morning, I woke up and said, "That's it. I've had enough." And in an instant, the switch flipped from on to off. I went from being a smoker to a nonsmoker, and I've never smoked a cigarette again. My secret? I decided to decide! I didn't just make the decision to stop smoking; I decided I was no longer a smoker.

Real change happens when you stop pursuing the kind of person you want to be and, in a moment, suddenly become that person. Because until you decide that's who you are, not who you are going to be, your vision is nothing more than a dream. To make that dream a reality, you must go from wanting to change to being the change.

Getting to the point of making a decision can take days, months, or even years. Sadly, some people never make the decision to get there. When people talk about taking their time to make a change, they're actually referring to the time leading up to the decision-making moment. But with decision comes instantaneous transformation.

In the moment of decision, we set in motion either a righteous or an unrighteous journey. My previous failed attempts to stop smoking had not been decisions at all. If they were, I would have stopped smoking! Instead, I was still trying to decide. Once I took the definitive step, I was a changed person for whom smoking was unthinkable. Even more important, my decision wasn't just to kick the habit. I challenged my identity and started doing things that were in direct conflict with being a smoker, like jogging, swimming, weightlifting, and competitive fighting. I made a decision and, in that very moment, set in motion the person I wanted to become.

DO OR DO NOT—THERE IS NO TRY

I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.

—PABLO PICASSO

Our greatest achievements don't happen by accident or by trying; they happen by deciding to do the things that are necessary to accomplish our goals. And if we don't know how to accomplish them, there's always someone out there who can help us learn. But we must decide to enter the loop of discovery by taking action. Either you do something, or you don't do it. *Trying* is essentially not doing.

When you say you're *trying*, you give yourself an excuse—you're off the hook, which opens the door to failure. But when you're doing, you have no excuses—only results.

Big difference!

Are you *trying* to work out and get in shape? Are you *trying* to eat more healthily? Are you *trying* to make more sales calls? Stop trying! Work out. Get in shape. Eat a healthier diet. Make more sales calls!

Start by eliminating the word "try" from your vocabulary. "Try" is a worthless term that accomplishes nothing. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Do the thing and you will have the power." If you want to create the life of your dreams, then you are going to have to decide to take 100 percent responsibility for your results. Not blame, the ability to respond. That means giving up all your excuses. If something doesn't turn out as planned, you will ask yourself, "What did I do or not do to create that?" When you don't like the outcome, change your approach. Do something different, but do something!

If you're going to accomplish great things, the excuses have to stop right now! And the trying must also stop. Do it!

Decide and decide now.

ACTION CREATES TRACTION

An African proverb goes like this: Every day in the Serengeti, a lion must run faster than the slowest gazelle to eat, or else it will starve and die. Every day in the Serengeti, a gazelle must run faster than the fastest lion to avoid being eaten, or else it will die. No matter who you are in the Serengeti, a lion or a gazelle, you better get up running.

Delay is a disease—the worst thing you can do when trying to accomplish a goal. Delay is certainly the worst thing for a gazelle in the Serengeti. There is a gap between intention and action. You feel it when you know what you ought to do, but you are not able to bring yourself to do it. Instead, you procrastinate and delay taking action.

Too often, people convince themselves that they'll do something when everything is "perfect." They wait until everything comes together or for the right conditions to materialize. They think and they analyze, telling themselves they'll do it "one day." I certainly do encourage you to learn all you can and prepare—that's not a delay. But when you walk around thinking, "I'll start—someday, maybe soon, just not right now," that's delay.

These are the people who say things such as, "I'm getting ready to start working out" or "I'm going to start dieting after my vacation." **The longer you put off committing to something, the easier it is to delay it even more, because the closer you get to a challenge, your fears amplify and the voice of doubt shouts even louder in your head.**

Doubt is like a pebble in your shoe. If you leave it there long enough, it eventually breaks the skin and creates a wound. If the wound is unattended, infection sets in and spreads. And if given long enough, the infection will kill you! Doubts fester and grow with delay. If you wait for the perfect time or when you think you have all the answers, you may never get started.

Dreams, visions, and goals are achieved and accomplished only through thinking creatively and taking action. The wheels of creativity spin with action. And if you're worried about making mistakes, you need to adjust your expectation. You are going to make mistakes

no matter when you get started! **When you pursue a goal, it's better to do something imperfectly than to do nothing flawlessly. It's better to take a small step than no step at all. It's better to make mistakes and learn lessons than to make no mistakes and learn nothing.** Know this: The sooner you start, the sooner you can start making progress by learning the important lessons that will propel you to your goal. It's not enough to have knowledge, a dream, or passion; it's what you do with what you know that counts. The best time to take action is now!

REVERSING POLARITY

Our minds can be masterful at creating compelling arguments for justifying inaction. But our minds can be just as powerful at motivating us. It's our perspective that needs to change.

Here's the secret: Reverse the polarity of your fears, so instead of them crippling you, they inspire you. Ask yourself, "What will it cost me if I don't take action? What will I lose out on, miss, or fail to experience in the most important areas of my life?" By zooming in on the long-term pain created by procrastination and bringing it into the present moment, you can leverage your fears. You do this by asking questions that illuminate the long-term consequences of delay.

When you're at a decision crossroads, ask yourself, "If I don't take action, what will it cost me in terms of health, money, relationships, career, self-esteem, joy, happiness, and freedom?" For example, if you don't take action in your relationship, what will it cost you in terms of love or irreversible damage? If you eat that piece of chocolate cake, what will it cost you in terms of having the body you desire?

Shift the short-term pleasure of being lazy and replace it with the pain of not taking action. Then the pain will motivate you, because short-term pain is a more powerful motivator than short-term pleasure. But the key is that you use it in a way that serves you. You may be focusing incorrectly on the perceived pain of driving to the gym and spending an hour working out. The question to ask is, "What type of pain will I experience in the long term if I don't take action, and what will it cost me if I continue to procrastinate?"

In his book *The Motivation Manifesto*, Brendon Burchard writes: "Heroism is taking action to do important things even when we are afraid. Cowardice is acting in accordance to our fears when our heart wishes to see us behave more nobly and courageously." Think about all the positive outcomes and possibilities you want, but embrace the truth that you will make mistakes in attaining them. Most great accomplishments require having the courage to act before the confidence arrives. When you embrace your fears, you defuse them, and in taking action, you dissolve them.

Here is the bottom line: You can dream, you can think positively, you can plan and set goals, but unless you act, nothing will materialize and your fears will still be there. Your hopes of success and greatness rest on whether or not your willingness to act is greater than your fears and apathy. Destiny favors those who act.

THE DECISION AUDIT

If you were to score yourself on how good you are at deciding, what would your "report card" look like? To find out, conduct a decision audit and score yourself on the quality of your decisions in various areas of your life. This will help you determine where you're confident in your decision making and pinpoint the areas in which you are relatively weaker and need some work. Don't overthink it! Your first instinct is likely the most accurate answer.

As you rate your decision-making abilities, a picture will emerge. Let's say that you are great in career, good in money and savings, good in planning for your future, but only okay in taking on new opportunities and poor in romantic relationships and family life. With that profile, you could see that your business life and finances are in pretty good shape. But as you examine other areas, you see that your romance and family life suffer. By being honest with yourself, you can identify the areas where you could be more empowered in your decision making. Your goal is to get to the point where you are well rounded and at least "good" in every category.

	Great	Good	Okay	Poor	Terrible
Career					
Money, Investments, and Savings					
Planning for Your Future					
Taking on New Opportunities					
Romantic Relationships					
Family Life					
Personal Growth and Learning					
Health and Fitness					
Leisure and Relaxation					
Friends and Social					
Job and Work Related					
Taking Decisive Action					
Being Spontaneous					
Taking Risks					
Pursuing a Dream					

If you never make important decisions, you won't build decision-making "muscles." You'll end up like the person who never exercises and whose muscles are weak—only in this case, your decision-making muscles atrophy. When that happens, you're more prone to make poor decisions, which will make your circumstances even worse. You'll lose confidence in your ability to make decisions, and your thinking will become smaller as you focus on playing it safe and not making a mistake.

You need to be proactive, starting with small decisions in the areas you are having the

most difficulty with. Then, as you build confidence in your decision making, you'll get more comfortable. When things don't work out as planned, you learn the lessons and move on to the next decision—and even bigger decisions—with greater clarity, insight, and information.

A DIET FOR YOUR MIND

By now you know the power of your thoughts and perceptions—what you assign meaning to, pain or pleasure. But how much control do you really have over what goes on in your mind? If you want a challenge, try the Emmet Fox seven-day diet (or perhaps start with just one or two days). For seven days, avoid all negative thinking. Okay, don't get scared; that's impossible. Here's the exercise:

Whenever you have a negative thought, you immediately replace it with a positive thought. You won't just stop thinking negatively or always think positively. Rather, you learn to think positive thoughts as often as possible, and you learn to respond to negative thoughts with solutions. The key is not holding onto a negative feeling any longer than it takes to recognize and acknowledge it. You notice it, replace it, and let it go!

All day long you communicate with yourself—tens of thousands of thoughts per day through internal self-talk. By taking the seven-day mental diet challenge, you will quickly discover how much of that internal chatter is disempowering. Replacing our negative thoughts means we have to communicate positively with ourselves. This is a very powerful mindfulness technique. Think of it as "replacement therapy." You decrease your focus on the negative, recognize when you are being tempted in that direction, and consciously replace negative thinking with positive alternatives.

Now don't just think to yourself, "That sounds interesting" or "That sounds like a good idea. I should do that someday." Make this shift now! Start your mental diet today!

THE QUALITY OF YOUR COMMUNICATION

One of the most effective ways of engaging in self-talk is by asking questions. The key, though, is to ask the right questions, because your mind will provide answers to whatever questions you ponder. Therefore, **the quality of your life is determined by the quality of your questions. When you ask empowering questions, you get empowering answers. Ask disempowering questions, you get the opposite.** If you ask, "Why did I make such a mistake? What's wrong with me?" the answer you get will likely discourage you by reinforcing what you did wrong. On the other hand, when you ask empowering questions —"What can I learn from what just happened?"—the answer you get provides solutions and you become motivated. It's all how you frame questions and communicate with yourself.

The human brain is wired to seek out conclusions. This has been proved with something called the Zeigarnik effect. In 1972, James Heimbach and Jacob Jacoby suggested in a paper that the jingle in some advertisements may play on the Zeigarnik effect, as viewers would feel a compulsion to hear a musical selection to its natural conclusion. The researchers hypothesized that audiences would be more likely to hear out an ad's content if accompanied by a recognizable tune than if there were no song.

It's much the same with questions that are engaging. They require a response—you have to see them to conclusion. When you ask *yourself* a question, your mind can't help but seek an answer, and that creates images. More specifically, when we ask our mind empowered questions, we often get empowered responses, and it gives us the best chance to engage and imprint our subconscious mind.

The words you say have a powerful impact on those around you, and they have an even

bigger impact on you, because *you* are constantly talking to *yourself* all day, every day. Monitor your thoughts. **If you are like most people, you will notice some key little phrases that you use over and over again. Do your words empower you, or do they program your subconscious for insecurity and failure?** For example, when something goes wrong, do you usually say, "I never can catch a break." There's nothing empowering about that statement! And if you keep saying "I never catch a break," it will become part of your identity, and you will start to think of yourself as someone who is unlucky that never catches a break. With that mindset, you will automatically gravitate to low-probability scenarios in life and then wonder why you are so "unlucky."

In 2018, during the first few minutes of a shooting competition in North Carolina, my gun experienced a severe malfunction, and I was forced to take a zero on that stage—something that would normally guarantee a very poor finish. I caught myself thinking, "I never catch a break." In that type of situation, it's easy to feel unlucky. But as soon as I noticed my negative thinking, I immediately decided to replace that thought and respond by asking myself two powerful questions: "Wouldn't it be awesome to have a great finish today after starting with a zero?" and "What would I have to do to give myself the best chance to make that happen?" I ended up finishing fourth that day, and it felt better than many of my first-place finishes.

Here are some empowering questions you can ask yourself:

- "What would I do if anything were possible?"
- "What would I try if I had no fears?"
- "How can I make my life more fun?"
- "What am I excited about for this year?"
- "What would my perfect day look like?"
- "What areas of my life am I ready to transform?"
- "What am I grateful for right now?"
- "How can I make a difference in the world?"
- "What is most important to me?"
- "What do I love about myself?"

CREATE LIFESTYLE HABITS

As you consider the decisions and actions you want to make in your life, you need to distinguish between short-term and permanent change. People try to better themselves all the time. Their high school reunion is coming up, so they go on a crash diet and lose 20 pounds. But soon they go back to eating the way they always have and gain it all back. The reason? They only made a temporary change.

Most people usually know, intellectually at least, what's good for them. They understand the philosophy behind making life changes. When they hear it again, they say to themselves, "I know that already." Knowledge is not power; it's only potential power. It's what you do with what you know that makes a difference. Understanding something is only the first step. Without application, intellect means nothing.

If you want to improve your life and create lasting change, you need to adopt a new way to look at habits. All of us have certain daily habits that are so engrained, they're automatic and unquestionable. Like brushing your teeth. You don't even think about it, and it's not like you're going to take a month off from brushing because you're bored with it, and you probably don't shower only when you're in a good mood. It must be the same in your other

pursuits, whether your aim is to become a master painter or a champion marathon runner. You practice regularly, and not begrudgingly. You do what you need to do because it's part of your lifestyle. You create and maintain "lifestyle habits."

Your new habit—exercising, eating healthily, practicing a sport, writing a book, going to acting classes, playing music, or whatever your goal—must become engrained to the point that it's just like brushing your teeth; it's part of your daily life. When you make these routines nonnegotiable, it becomes easier to make decisions to support them because they simply become a task among tasks that everything else in your life revolves around, and it's no longer a struggle to maintain discipline.

SEEK WISDOM OVER ADVICE

Often when we are contemplating a big decision, we seek out advice and encouragement. For that, we tend to gravitate to our friends, parents, siblings, and other family members. That's our default—and it's certainly the most convenient place to look. But as it turns out, it can be the worst place. **The people closest to you could be the poorest sources of advice. Why? Because they care about you, and they want to protect you from failure and disappointment.** So they tell you things like "Play it safe" or "Have something to fall back on." They'll ask you, "Why take the risk?" It's all well meaning, but if you take that advice, you'll never accomplish anything really great.

There are three keys to getting the right kind of help:

First, seek wisdom, not advice. Advice tells you what to do; wisdom tells you how to figure out what to do. If you rely on advice, you will always need advice. But with wisdom, you can learn how to be the master of your own destiny.

Second, avoid all that weakens you. There's a very simple litmus test: If it's not constructive or encouraging, it's weakening you. It can be something you don't like hearing, but it should be constructive and solution-based. Rarely have I met a highly successful person who wasn't encouraging, but I have met many unsuccessful people who always seem to see the negative side of things, and they can't wait to share it with the world. Avoid those people!

Third, seek out those who are smarter than you, are more skilled than you, and have more proven success than you (particularly in the area you want to succeed in). Note that those closest to you, your family and friends, may or may not meet these criteria. And when seeking help, use the 2:1 rule: Listen twice as much as you talk, and if you're going to talk, ask questions instead of trying to prove how smart you are.

FORM YOUR OWN "BOARD"

Large corporations have boards of directors. The role of the board is to help direct the company's strategy and provide guidance. Board members include a carefully selected mix of professional experts with a range of expertise. Together, these board members help the company meet its goals.

In the same way, we all have a "board of directors." Your board members could be your mother and father, your priest or minister or other spiritual leaders, your best friend, or your spouse and immediate family—whomever you choose and trust. But don't limit yourself to the people in your immediate circle. Choose well those who are going to influence you, because they'll have an impact on what you believe and how you reach your goals. And it's not even necessary for you to have a relationship with the members of your board; they can still influence you.

Most of my "board members" are the great thinkers of our time and authors of books that

have impacted me. In fact, I still read the same books and listen to the same audio programs I purchased 10, 20, and 30 years ago. Revisiting these materials allows me to stay in touch with my "board members" as often as possible. I first encountered them when I started, which was when I began to build my "success library" of books and audio programs. (I even have a portable digital success library that I take with me everywhere.) Many of these "board members" don't know how much they "advise" me—it's my little secret. But that doesn't diminish their influence.

In the same way, you can choose your own personal advisory board members, and they don't even have to give you permission. So don't settle for the guidance of just anyone. Raise your standards by raising your circle of influence. Construct your own board of directors to educate and inspire you. The more informed and inspired you become, the more supported and empowered you'll feel in making decisions and taking action.

WHAT WILL YOU DECIDE?

In this moment, you have opportunities to change your life; everyone does. Or you can fall into a trap that is equally life-changing, but in a negative way. I know; I've been there. Any of us can make a poor decision that would put our lives in jeopardy or compromise the trajectory of our destiny. Or we could decide to change and control our associations and redirect our lives in a positive direction. Just as a smoker can become an ex-smoker by putting out the last cigarette or an alcoholic can put down a drink and never touch a drop again, so it is with limiting beliefs and behaviors. **Change happens in an instant. You can decide to be the owner of your world—or a victim of your circumstances. You can flip the switch and activate your dreams, starting today. But first you have to decide to decide.**

The choice is in your hands. What will you decide? Will you keep going with the status quo? Will you let your past create the same kind of future? Will you allow chance to make the decisions for you about the amount and quality of health, wealth, and happiness you experience?

You will never know what your true potential really is until you make the decision to believe in your own ability and take action. Learn from your victories, from your mistakes, and from the past. Then commit to an unconditional march in the directions of your dreams. You will amaze yourself!

You deserve to have success and passion in your life—a big goal worth committing yourself to. You deserve to engage in a life that sparks your interest and challenges you intellectually. The fact that you are reading this book means you have something greater inside that's trying to find a way to come out. And I can tell you right now, if you don't love your life, it is because someone else influenced it more than you did. Don't let that happen. It's time to put your past behind and create the future you're meant to embody. You are a winner creating a life of happiness and abundance. Remember, your reality isn't waiting to be discovered, it's waiting to be created. But to create the life you dream of, you need to stop thinking in terms of fear, anxiety, and nervousness. Instead, think in terms of excitement and step into the spotlight of whatever it is you want to do. Founder of the National Speakers Association, Cavett Robert used to say, "Don't try to get rid of the butterflies in your stomach. Just get them to fly in formation."

Go ahead: Flip the switch; there is no better time. Decide right now to commit to being the best version of yourself and never turn back.

CHAPTER 6

PRIORITIZING YOUR PASSION AND GOAL GETTING

It's obvious that if you want to be really great at something, you should be passionate about it, right? After all, how many people persist and become great at something they hate?

When people have passion, nobody has to twist their arm to get them to work or practice. It's a safe bet that 17-year-old snowboarder Red Gerard, who shocked the world by winning a gold medal at the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics in South Korea, has plenty of passion for his sport. His agility, love of speed, and ability to execute death-defying jumps on the snowboard helped him develop the skills to master his runs and achieve his dream of becoming an Olympic champion.

But it takes more than just passion. And while this chapter covers passion and goals, it doesn't end there. It's your priorities, those "must-haves" and "must-dos," that really determine what you succeed at. This isn't merely what you want—wants are weak! If you wanted something badly enough, you'd have it already, or you would at least be making meaningful progress toward attaining it. The question is, what's most important to you?

"I wish I could do that; I just don't have enough time"—people tell me this all the time. But what they really mean is it's just not important enough. There are other things that are higher on their priority scale, because we all have the same 24 hours in a day.

In studying individuals who reached greatness, from Olympic champions to those who accomplished huge success in the business world, I've found that they succeed because they assign a primary importance to whatever they're going after. What they're most passionate about—what they are completely focused on—is more important than virtually anything else in their lives. Yes, you need the fire of passion to get you going and keep you going. But passion won't take you the distance, no matter how much you love something. You must make your passion *a priority*.

GETTING VERSUS SETTING

What shows up in your life is not what you want or hope to have, nor is it about the goals you set. It's all about what you prioritize and focus on the most. Priorities are the heart and soul of the goals you ultimately achieve, because you'll willingly make the sacrifices required to bring them to fruition.

Most people have goals, things they'd like to have or achieve. That's great! But you need to go beyond just setting goals. Goal setting might include such objectives as eating a healthier diet, losing weight, going to the gym more often, or saving for retirement. These are general "wishes" of what you'd like to see happen. Goal *getting*, though, is more involved and specific. Goal getting means really going after something with a well-thought-out plan and a commitment to stay the course.

A comprehensive review of more than 100 studies on goal setting revealed that 90 percent of them showed positive effects. To get more out of goal setting, though, research

shows that your goals need to be specific, not vague. The research reveals convincingly that when people are asked just to "do their best," they don't. But with detailed, measurable goals and a deadline—e.g., being able to jump 6 feet, 5 inches, by the end of the season or increasing your maximum bench press to 240 pounds—performance improves. The more specific the goals, the better the chances of attaining them.

The Three Stages of a Goal

When most people make a goal, by default, they set an "outcome goal"—that is, the goal is the result. For example, you make it your goal to get in shape. So you go to the gym and work out. Or your goal may be to run a marathon by the end of the year. That's great! But in between your initial enthusiasm and actually running and finishing the race, there's conditioning and training. As with any serious goal, it takes process and performance to get there. The more crystal clear you are in defining those steps, the more likely you are to reach your goal. The steps to success for every goal can be broken down into three stages:

1. Process
2. Performance
3. Outcome

Your *process goals* reflect what you need to do in order to perform. You approach your process goals as you would a blueprint or a path leading to an end point. **Process goals are the most important part of goal getting, because if you get the process right, the result takes care of itself.** For example, you tell yourself, "In my workout today, for my chest training I need to do 10 reps per set for four sets." That's the process.

Your *performance goal* could be to increase the maximum weight by 10 percent and squeeze out two extra reps. While the *outcome goal* is to have 4 percent more lean muscle mass, with a body fat reading of 10 percent by December 31.

This is the kind of specificity that improves performance and the probability of success. Instead of setting vague goals such as "I need to eat healthier, exercise more, and lose weight," you determine a specific action plan. You're cutting your calorie intake by a certain amount every day, eating red meat only once a week, and increasing your consumption of green, leafy vegetables and water intake by a measured amount. Your goal, or finish line, is to weigh 30 pounds less by a specific date. Now you have a concrete goal and a specific plan to get there. But you still are not likely to achieve your goal unless you do one more key thing—you need to make that goal your master priority.

WHAT IS YOUR MASTER PRIORITY?

All of us have multiple goals. Let's say your list is to grow your business, stay healthy and physically in shape, have a family and spend quality time with them, retire by age 45, and write that book you always wanted to publish. There may even be some overlap; being able to retire would give you more quality time with family, while growing your business successfully could enable you to retire early. But you can't do it all at once and be great at everything. One big goal must come first. Which is it going to be?

Whatever is most important to you is your master priority, but there's a compromise here. You can't have multiple master priorities. There can be only one primary goal, and everything else revolves around it. To honor the master priority, there are some sacrifices to be made. Some other areas of your life will get less attention. I can assure you, right now in your life, a default master priority exists that everything else serves. But it may not really be the master priority that you want to take the top spot. **Ask yourself this question: "When it**

really comes down to it, what does everything else take a back seat to?" That's your master priority.

To achieve a big goal, some things in your life must take a back seat. When I was much younger, I set a goal of achieving financial freedom by age 35—a lofty goal indeed, considering I had no money, no formal education, and no job! That was precisely why I couldn't allow anything to get in my way. I put off getting married and having a family until I achieved financial independence, because I knew the demands of my master priority would conflict with my personal life. But once I achieved my goal, it became much easier to achieve the rest. And now I have a wonderful family life, enjoy meaningful hobbies, write books, and help others around the world as an educator.

Your master priority should be a dream worth trading your life's time for, and nothing is allowed to hinder your progress toward attaining it. In my case, my primary goal was supportive of my other goals and helped make them possible. And that's precisely how you should structure your goal hierarchy. If you're clear on your priorities, it will be that much easier for you to design the best outcome for your life. When you set your goals and prioritize them, one supported by the others, then achieving your primary goal sets off a domino effect. When one goal is achieved, it clears the way for the next.

WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT ALWAYS WINS OVER WHAT YOU WANT THE MOST

Prioritization is a process, and it starts with some deep introspection around who you are, who you want to be, and what you really want to accomplish. Most people, though, have no clue about what they *really* want. Sure, they know what they'd *like* to have: a great job, financial security, health, happiness, respect, a good family life . . . Or maybe it's a big house, a nice car, travel . . . But in the midst of their daydreaming, they don't really have a clear vision of what is *most important* to them.

If really wanting something was the key to getting it, think about all the things you would have and how easy it would be to attain them. **Wishing, hoping, and wanting is one thing; what you actually pursue and how you live your life is another. In between is something called *prioritizing.*** You're doing this already, whether you realize it or not. You're making choices all the time, often unconsciously, to do one thing instead of another, to focus on "A" instead of doing "B." Every day, every hour, and every minute, you come to a fork in the road and have to choose what's going to take priority over something else. These choices all threaded together are what determine where you end up in life and what you accomplish. To realize the life you really want, you must become deliberate in your prioritizing, because when the inevitable distractions roll into your life, like fog surrounding a ship, you will have a lighthouse that shines a beacon and guides you to your intended destination. In short, your wants and your priorities must be aligned.

Will the Real Priority Please Stand Up?

I used to conduct an exercise with people who worked for me, asking them to make a list of everything they wanted—every desire and goal they hoped to achieve. I also instructed them to put them in order, with what they want most at the top, followed by what they want to attain next, and so forth. Their lists often looked similar: They wanted financial success and the material things that come with having money: a new house, fancy cars, travel, etc. Sometimes they had more intrinsic goals like earning their place in a particular field—e.g., being recognized and well respected.

Then I'd collect the lists and put them away. After a good amount of time had passed (at least five or six months), I'd ask everyone to write down the things that were absolutely the most important in their lives in order of importance. Family, health, God, security, and freedom were all very popular answers. . . . That's when we'd play the "matching game."

I would then take out their original wish list and compare it, side by side, with the priority list. In almost every case, there were only a few matchups (and sometimes none at all) in the top slots. Money topped the list of wants, but family was at the top of priorities. The next wants were a big house, a fancy car, and a seven-figure investment account, but those slots on the priority list were job security, vacation time, and weekends with family.

When you think of it this way, these conflicts were eye-opening, because they showed a lack of congruency between wants and priorities. The differences in these lists show where the difficulties are going to arise—the interruptions, distractions, and even guilt! You want to go for it to achieve financial success in your business or to be a champion in your chosen field, but you'll feel the constant pull—and the guilt that goes with it—for not being with your family as much as they think you should.

Dr. Wayne Dyer said, "You must learn to live your life independent of the good opinion of others." To live the life you truly desire, you must be true to your passion and make that passion the highest priority. You will be able to identify and pursue your dreams, not just by setting goals but by "getting" them.

I'm not saying we should go after money, material possessions, or accomplishments at the expense of our health or family. But there is one thing I can guarantee. **The things you assign the most importance to and put the most time into are the things that are going to show up in your life the most. What you prioritize is what you get.**

Your priorities define how you approach life and what you are willing to do. Let's say one person believes that adventure is the most important feeling to have in her life, while another person says security is the most important in his life. Are these two people going to make the same kind of decisions? Who is more likely to go skydiving or bungee jumping? Or one person says love and closeness are most important, and another person says freedom and personal space are paramount. Who is more likely to be in a committed relationship? What if these two people were married?

Try this exercise:

1. List what's most important to you.
2. Determine the values you really want to live by.
3. Ask yourself how you spend most of your time.

If you were to list what is most important to you, and then contrast that list with how you are living your life, would it be congruent? For most people, other components of their life and responsibilities pull on them. This needs to be managed. Because if your priorities aren't in alignment with your true desires, you'll constantly undermine the pursuit of your dreams. Consciously or unconsciously, you'll choose your priorities. If you do so consciously, you'll be in charge of your life. If you act unconsciously, your priorities will "just happen." Remember, what's most important always wins over what you want the most.

What is most important to you?

THE POWER OF WHY

Once you establish your master priority and define your goals, to achieve each goal you need to consider one very important question: "Why am I doing this?" Without a meaningful "why," you are likely to lose motivation. Your what, when, and how need a big why! The why defines your "pay value." It explains why you are making the sacrifices to attain your

goals and what the payoff will be. This is your mission. You can even create a mission statement, a summation of your personal reasons for wanting to accomplish your goal. Charles Garfield wrote, “With few exceptions, peak performers are highly motivated by a deep and personal sense of mission, which is distinctly different from highly measurable goals.” For example, you might want to run a 26K marathon and to do it by a certain date, and you make it a priority. But your mission is to conquer your physiological and psychological limitations to push your capabilities.

In addition to setting the what, why, when, and how, every morning before I start my day, I ask myself a few empowering questions, beginning with “What can I do today to get closer to my goal?” Then at the end of the day, I ask: “What did I learn today, and how can I use what I’ve learned to get closer to my goal tomorrow?” And when I’m having difficulty, I always take the time to ask: “What’s stopping me from reaching my goal? What can I do right now, today, to break through that limitation?” Ideally, if you choose to ask yourself these questions, write the answers down in a journal.

People who wake up each day with a primary purpose, and with a clear what, why, when, and how they are going to be the best they can be, have little in common with those who just wake up and go about their day. It’s the difference between great achievers and everyone else.

Contemplating your what, why, when, and how will get you closer to your dreams by creating self-awareness and putting your focus on your purpose and your goals. You’ll have your eye on the finish line, as well as the milestones toward your goal and anything that’s standing in your way. And by asking the right questions, the answers will be clear and guiding.

What’s your mission, and why are you doing what you are doing?

THE COMPANY YOU KEEP

Take a moment to write down all the people you spoke with and interacted with over the past six months, the people that dominated the majority of your time. List them all. If there are too many to remember, you could use your cell phone and text message log to jog your memory. Write down everyone’s name.

Now, on the other side of the page, write down your goals. Next, draw a line and connect people on the list who have a positive influence or something to do with helping you reach your goals. If you’re like most people, there won’t be too many connecting lines. Just a lot of wasted time with people, places, and things that do little to advance you in the direction of your dreams.

If you want to be a champion, if you want to do amazing things, you need to immerse yourself in the people, places, and things that are going to support your vision. Minimize the time you spend on distractions. If you can’t find people to inspire you, read books.

THE UNBALANCED CHAMPION

If you do what you love, you’ll never work a day in your life.

—MARC ANTHONY

The best way to become a champion is to be all in. Your dream is your top priority, and it is essentially *all* you focus on. This is the approach of many professional and elite athletes, especially when they’re training for something as important as the Olympics. To illustrate this level of extreme passion and commitment, a hypothetical question was posed years ago

to several elite athletes, in a scenario known as Goldman's dilemma (after physician Robert Goldman who conducted the research). Would an elite athlete take a drug that would guarantee phenomenal success in his or her sport (e.g., winning an Olympic gold medal), but the consequence would be dying five years later? Half of the athletes said yes.

It's not that these athletes would definitely take such a substance. Rather, it shows the extreme intensity and commitment found among elite competitors. This is a classic case of being "unbalanced."

Champions in all endeavors, from sports to the business world, are trying to achieve something extraordinary. They're going for the gold medal (or the equivalent in their area). This is not the kind of pursuit that generally supports a balanced life—lots of social time and numerous hobbies. It calls for a laser focus and sacrifices.

As I've seen in my own study of elite performers, few could ever be described as "well rounded," particularly when they are pursuing greatness. Tennis legend Chris Evert, winner of 18 Grand Slam singles championships, said, "I hate to say it because I don't think it's the best thing for developing a person, but single-mindedness—just concentrating in one area—that's what it takes to be a champion." Most top performers are relentlessly focused on their dreams and goals with an intense passion and absorption. Virtually everything else in their life gets adjusted to make room for consistent progress toward the attainment of their dream. They devote a disproportionate amount of time to their work and are regarded as workaholics. I know; I was one of them. My family and friends would always tell me, "You work too hard" or "You don't ever take time for yourself." I would just laugh, because they didn't understand that I was taking almost all my time for myself! I was living my passion.

TIME BLOCKING

Pursuing your top priorities and goals doesn't mean you can't have a family, kids, or a job or live a healthy life. But it would be wise if the people closest to you are onboard with what you're doing. To a certain degree, it takes a self-sufficient partner to accommodate an exceptional performer. With your children, you may need to miss some soccer practices, and your spouse or partner may need to understand that you may not be home for dinner every night. Your boss may need to allow you to work flexible hours so that you get all your work done in a timely manner. This flexibility will enable you to schedule other things, such as taking a class or taking a long run as you train for the marathon.

The biggest impediments, though, are often the people in your life who suddenly have to get used to the fact that you're not available 24/7. It's more like 10/7, which is still a lot of time! But there will be blocks of time when you're not around. And that time is sacred and set aside for the single-minded pursuit of your goal. In an ideal situation, that's also the time the others in your life are also working on their important goals.

My solution is something I call "time blocking." I literally divide my waking hours into sections of time (blocks)—Monday through Friday, Saturday and Sunday—during which I will engage in specific activities. For example, Monday through Friday I have certain hours when I only work on things related to my business. Other slots are set aside for relaxation and personal time. Friday evening and most of the day Saturday are dedicated to family time. I devote certain days and hours to my hobbies. I lay this all out like a doctor or dentist with an appointment calendar. Each time slot belongs to that activity and *only* that activity. That's why it's called time blocking. You block off time for what you need to do, and nothing can get in the way; no distractions allowed.

I discovered time blocking when my life became multifaceted and I was being pulled in many different directions. I found it to be an essential tool, and so will you. We all have jobs and families and other responsibilities. Rather than assume that we can't be passionate about

a dream, make it a priority, and pursue it with intensity.

The people in your life need to know how important these time blocks are. Soon they will come to respect your time, but only if you respect it. **Everyone in your life must know that your time blocks are sacred. During that time, you are only going to be focused on the scheduled event for that block.** You may need to shut your phone off and set some rules about not being disturbed under any condition. Believe me, you're not so important that an hour or two or even an entire day can't go on without you. The world will keep turning, and everyone will be okay.

I know people who have five kids, a wonderful family life, and several hobbies, and are also super successful in business. I also know people with big families who are super-achieving athletes and touring musicians. Just because you have a spouse, children, and a job doesn't mean you can't accomplish great things. **Everybody faces the same time limit: There are only 24 hours in a day. What matters is how you apportion them. You don't find time; you make time.** Your job is to make the most efficient use of the time you spend with your family and the time you spend pursuing your passion. Time blocking will help you accomplish that.

Don't Break the Block

This is where people mess up. They attempt to time-block, and then they break the block. Here's an example: A friend of mine and I decided we were going to exercise together, following a specific program that worked best with a buddy system. We agreed on particular blocks of time each week—certain days at a specific time—at his house. One day, early on in our training sessions, my friend's nephew showed up at the house. He had a flat tire and needed help, so my friend had to stop exercising to help his nephew. The next time, his wife interrupted us to say she needed help with the baby.

Whatever it was, something always interfered with our workouts. This brought home a very important realization: My friend and I were very different when it came to making and keeping this commitment. For me, that time was blocked off only for exercise. My phone was off, and people knew not to try to reach me. Barring death or national emergency, I wasn't giving up this time. My friend, however, let too many things get in the way of our commitment to exercise together, and I soon realized I needed to find a new exercise partner.

Time blocking only becomes possible when you recognize that the world won't collapse if you're out of pocket for a few hours or even an entire day. Nothing will happen during that time that someone else can't handle. If you died tomorrow, people would have to find a way to fix tires, get rides, and even handle an emergency.

More important, I've found that by blocking off this time for my priority, afterward I am all the more present and available to my family and others. I have a sense of accomplishment in what I just did, and now I can commit fully to the next time block. My fear of not getting something done disappears. In the same way, during the time blocks dedicated to my family, I am equally diligent in making sure that nothing—not work or outside phone calls—interferes.

If you want to adopt the habits of a champion, then wherever you are, be there 100 percent. When you go from the office to the gym, leave your work and work-related thoughts at the office. Address those issues when you can do something about them, during their own time block.

THE ART OF WHITEBOARDING

When people set goals, they often use Post-it notes to motivate and remind themselves. I've

seen some people who have Post-its all over the place; they have Post-its to remind themselves to read the Post-its, and they have a Post-it that reminds them to buy more Post-its! Leave Post-its for those "in-the-moment" things you have to remember—like "Buy milk" or "Pick up the mail for the neighbors."

For your really important goals, you need something much bigger and more impactful. If you're going to dream big, you need the tools that allow you to do so. And that's where the whiteboard comes in. In my office, I have a giant whiteboard, measuring eight feet by six feet, as well as smaller ones. My whiteboards allow me to keep my goals right in front of me, large as life. With all that space to fill with ideas and plans, I can be as big and as bold as I need to be.

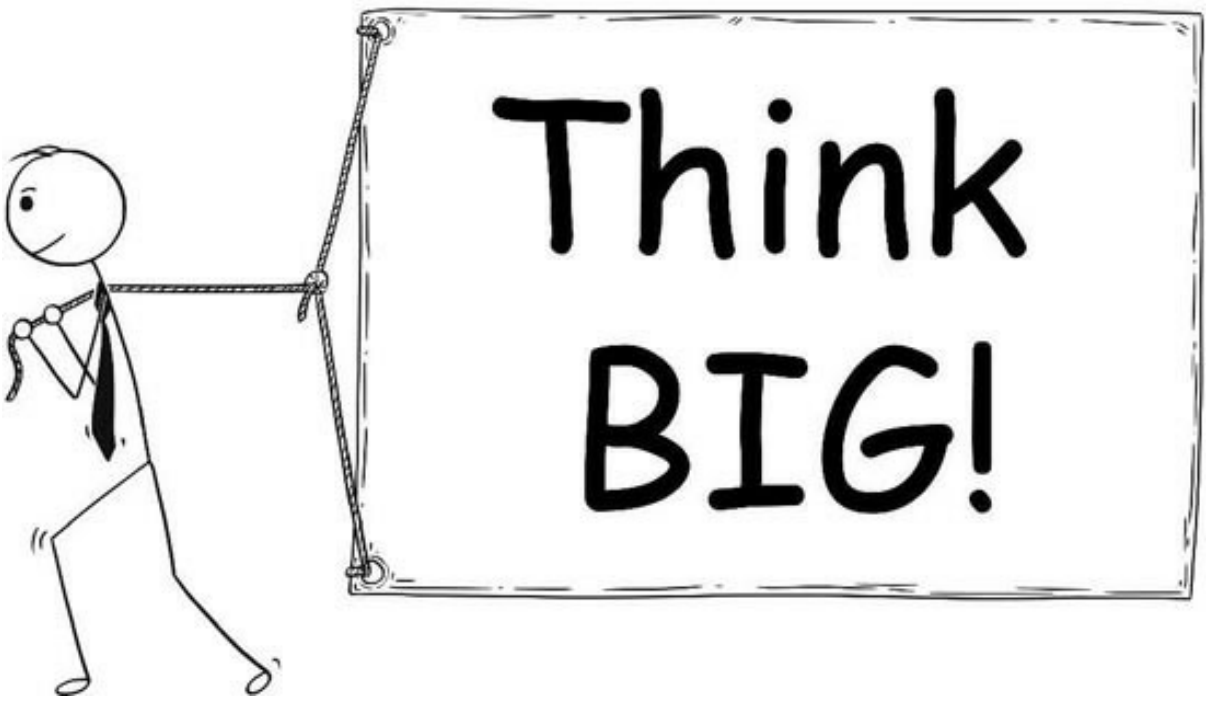
To explain how I use my whiteboards, let me tell you a story about my dear friend Harold, who needed to learn how to envision his goals and put a plan into action. Harold, who is in the music business, calls me from time to time for advice about his goals and plans, including when he's feeling stuck. One time, he sounded pretty discouraged. "I'm just not making progress," he admitted. Harold had made some big goals for the year, but he felt overwhelmed and stuck, unable to move forward.

"Do you have a whiteboard?" I asked him.

Harold's reply said everything. "What's a whiteboard?"

I instructed him to go to his nearest office supply store and buy the largest whiteboard he could find. When he came back, I told him to "brainstorm, big-board style."

As I explained to Harold, your whiteboard is for brainstorming all your ideas—your plans and dreams. Nothing is too audacious or too "out there." Any dream or idea that comes to mind is written down or diagrammed. That's why you're using the biggest whiteboard possible, to capture your biggest ideas. Pretty soon, your whiteboard will be covered with scrawls, notes, and drawings. It's meant to be a brain dump of dreams and possibilities. And don't hide your whiteboard in some corner. It needs to be front and center, right where you can see it every day, all day long.



Harold got started working on his giant whiteboard. Soon after, I asked him to send me a picture of it so I could see what he'd done so far. He had so much stuff on it, at least 50 or 60

different items! It was covered. But the problem was, Harold had overwhelmed himself.

"It's great that you've done all this brainstorming," I told him. "But now you need to filter down and prioritize."

Instantly, I could hear the relief in Harold's voice. His creative mind had come up with so many ambitious dreams, visions, and plans. But he needed to prioritize so those ideas didn't stay in the pipedream stage and to prevent him from becoming so overwhelmed that he couldn't move forward.

After several months of brainstorming on his whiteboard and funneling his ideas to an actionable list, Harold called me again. "That whiteboard is haunting me, man. Every time I see it, I'm confronted with what I should be doing and where I should be making progress."

"Exactly!" I told him. "That's precisely why it needs to be in your face. That means it's doing its job."

Harold wasn't really complaining. But the experience of confronting his goals every day had raised his standards. He was challenged by his own procrastination of the action he needed to take.

Your whiteboard should nag you, like when you were a kid and your mother used to tell you to "clean your room" or "wake up for school." The key is to keep your goals in front of you as often as possible and in plain view. You want to make your whiteboard your "enforcer." That way, you'll be face-to-face with the what, why, when, and how. Your whiteboard will also reveal where you have set such a low bar for yourself that you went through a bunch of goals that didn't really challenge you or help you progress.

You need to see your dreams and goals every day, so you become hyperaware of when a goal starts getting stale and you're not making meaningful progress. This will help you keep moving in the direction of your goals.

ALWAYS BE STRETCHING

Great athletes and top performers know the importance of having a coach who will push them hard beyond a level that they, themselves, can imagine. If you set your own goals, there's a good chance you will limit yourself. Your near-term goals should be attainable, but don't make them too easy. You might feel some momentary satisfaction from checking something off the list. But if it's too easy—e.g., something that you were already doing and that's not really much of an accomplishment—your satisfaction will be fleeting.

Always set a stretch goal. A *stretch goal* is a near-term goal that pushes you beyond what you previously achieved. You want stepping-stone goals that represent incremental progress toward a larger goal. Those interim goals should stretch you beyond where you are currently. Otherwise, you're not really growing and developing.

Consider this story: Two brothers went to a motivational lecture on goal setting. One said to the other, "Why don't we set income goals for next year? I'll write my goal down and seal it in an envelope, and you write yours down and seal it in an envelope. A year from now, we'll see what happens."

So one brother wrote down $50,000, and the other wrote down $1 million. They sealed their envelopes and never shared the number with each other. A year later, the brother who wrote down $50,000 was very excited when he opened his envelope. "This stuff really works. I made $54,000—that's the most money I've ever made." Then the other brother opened his envelope, "Well, unfortunately I only made it halfway to my goal. I guess you could say I failed. I made $500,000."

Setting goals can set limits. For example, when I was working on Wall Street in the 1990s, I saw many newbies in the business with what they thought were lofty goals—typically, to make a certain amount of income. More often than not, when that level was

reached, they lost steam and started getting comfortable. We used to call it the “cap.” That’s the amount of money someone needed to make to get complacent, just enough to attain what the person saw as “the good life.” This is the danger of setting your own goals. If you set a goal, say, to make a certain amount of income next year or reach a particular level of performance in some other area, it’s unlikely that you will exceed it by very much.

BE UNREALISTIC

When you are full of dreams, passion can lead you to pursue what may appear to be unrealistic goals and do things that no one understands, and few people will do. But that is precisely what gives you the opportunity to reach greatness. **Champions are not realistic. They are audacious dreamers who set big goals. They’re not worried about setting goals too high; they’re afraid of setting them too low.** All great performers have high standards. And almost all of them know the importance of consistently pushing themselves to new levels.

Dreaming big doesn’t necessarily mean having more money, more possessions, or winning titles. Maybe your dream is to help end world hunger, or to be an ambassador for world peace, or to simply inspire others by leading an exemplary life. The point is to dream big! What you think is a big dream now, may turn out to be small in hindsight once you achieve it. If that weren’t the case, we would still be in the Stone Age.

The number one reason why people don’t succeed in a big way is because it never occurs to them that they can do it. As a result, they never try, or they give up and quit as soon as the going gets tough. Where there’s a lack of dreams, there’s a lack of motivation and progress. Having an unrealistic imagination is the starting point for greatness. If you want to make a contribution to the world, dream big!

Encourage your children to dream and fantasize. For as far back as I can remember, I had these wild fantasies and visions of doing and achieving great things in my life. That gave me the motivation and a vision for what I could achieve. When you dream big and follow your passion, you begin to do new and different things, gradually at first, until the whole direction of your life changes.

In the beginning, our dreams always feel so immense. We wonder how we’re ever going to achieve them. We think about the enormity of the task ahead of us. But little by little, you make progress. One achievement here and another there add up over time. And eventually, those wins start to stack up, one by one. This helps to build momentum, moving you closer to your goals. By being willing to set an unrealistic goal, you instantly have an advantage over 99 percent of everyone else, because few are willing to think big and attempt great things. You realize that there’s a long road ahead, but you’re also willing to do what it takes to get there, and that is what makes you a winner.

BEING BETTER COMES BEFORE BEING BEST

You want to dream big and stretch yourself, but you must make your short-term goals attainable. Expecting to prepare for your first marathon in only three weeks or to lose 40 pounds in one month is not an achievable goal. The problem isn’t the goal. Rather, the timeline is too short, which sets you up for failure and disappointment before you even start. When you fail to make progress, you feel anxiety—not motivation. You’ll give up, thinking you’ve failed, when the real culprit was a flawed plan for achieving it.

As you set big goals, parse them into smaller increments that build momentum toward what you want ultimately to achieve. Your focus should be on progress, not the final result.

Along the way, you'll become the person you need to be: disciplined and focused, capable of becoming super effective during your time blocking. You'll be hitting your short- and intermediate-term goals, which affirms that you're on the right track.

10 Steps for Making Your Goal a Reality

1. Make your passion your master priority.
2. Have a big "why." Your master priority should be something worth trading your life for.
3. Break down your outcome goal into smaller incremental progress steps; focus on each step and then move on t next.
4. Align your goals. Look for goal overlap and determine if your goals are supportive of each other.
5. Don't focus on too many goals at one time.
6. Understand the time commitment needed to achieve your goals. Time-block and treat each block as a sacred slo is not to be disturbed or interrupted.
7. Make your goals specific, measurable, and challenging, but also achievable and time-bound.
8. Use a whiteboard to brainstorm and keep your goals in front of you and make them as big as possible.
9. Don't be afraid to modify your goals. If you suffer an injury, you may have to lower your goal if it relies on phy performance. If you are achieving goals too easily, you may have to adjust them and make your goals challenging.
10. Divide your goals into three categories: process (the way you are going to tackle them), performance (the pro you're making), and outcome (the results you're achieving).

STAY HUNGRY

In the 1970s and 1980s, Miller Brewing Company ran a series of ads that popularized the slogan "It's Miller Time." The ads were simple—blue-collar workers coming home from a hard day at the job, worthy of Miller Time. The message: You work hard; you deserve a reward. Now it's time to relax and enjoy a nice, cold Miller beer—you've earned it. It was a brilliant advertising campaign.

McDonald's ran a similar campaign: "You deserve a break today, so get up and get away, to McDonald's." Like "It's Miller Time," the McDonald's campaign tapped into a very basic human tendency to rationalize why it's okay to break discipline and be lazy. I call it the Miller Time effect. For example, to improve your health you may be committed to eating a healthier diet and going to the gym more often. Yet success at eating healthily can reduce your motivation to work out. You may rationalize to yourself that because you had a salad for lunch, you don't really need to exercise.

An experiment at the University of Chicago illustrated this human tendency to self-rationalize lapses in discipline. Researchers recruited dieters and gave each one a congratulatory update on the progress they made toward reaching their goal weight. Afterward, the participants were presented with a choice of either an apple or a chocolate bar as a reward. In the experiment, 85 percent of the dieters who had been reminded of their progress chose the chocolate bar over the apple. After all, they rationalized, they earned it. That was the same thinking as "You deserve a break today" and "It's Miller Time."

Be aware: To succeed at anything worthwhile, you need to take control of your life and avoid self-defeating impulses and distractions. For whatever goal you want to achieve, there will be discomfort along the journey. Self-discipline drives you through this uneasiness. It's an essential component of mastery, and nothing great was ever accomplished without it. But self-discipline does not exist in a vacuum. Often, you will be distracted and enticed. Your goal is to push through temptation and remain disciplined until your new routine becomes an unconscious habit. Keeping your eye on the prize will help motivate you to remain disciplined instead of rationalizing why you should "reward" yourself with something that will only undermine all your hard work and set you back. On the road to greatness, the

reward is the journey.

LET THE POWER OF YOUR DREAM COMPEL YOU

At this point, you're probably thinking of goals that you really want to achieve. In fact, I hope you're really fired up to the point that you've started writing on your own whiteboard, or at least you're planning on getting a whiteboard. But dreaming and planning, while important initial steps, are only that. They just get you started, giving you an end point on which to focus.

The real change happens as you go for your goals. And this, unfortunately, is where most people get off track. They make an attempt, discover that it's hard or that their dreams conflict with daily life, and their enthusiasm wanes. To be successful in achieving big goals, you need to understand what it's going to take. The whiteboarding exercise is powerful for unlocking your creativity, for dreaming big, for envisioning possibilities and organizing your vision. But you do need to bring that plan into your daily schedule and take consistent action.

Roger Bannister, who became the first human to break the four-minute mile, recalled the time before he accomplished that feat. In his memoir, he wrote, "I imagined bombs and machine guns raining on me if I didn't go my fastest." Talk about mental motivation!

My personality is such, that if I am going to do something, I give it every ounce of my energy, mental and physical. When I was young and learning to play the drums, for example, I lived with my mother and had no major living expenses, so I could put all my time into practicing, and I took advantage of that. I practiced every day, all day, until I became really good. When I told this story, people would say, "Well, that's because you lived at home."

Then when I got my own home and pursued other goals, people would say, "Well, that's because you aren't married" and "You don't have any kids." Later when I was married and had a daughter, people would say to me, "Well, that's because you only have one child." And then, after I made lots of money, people would say to me, "Well, that's because you're rich." No! They didn't understand. My process of goal setting and goal getting is what got me rich and successful, not the other way around.

Steve Gamlin once said, "I refuse to lower my standards to accommodate those who refuse to raise theirs." Life need not be a big handicap when it comes to giving your all to a pursuit. For me, family life hasn't been a handicap at all. I have found it's possible to achieve the kind of focus, intensity, and commitment needed to excel at many things and still have a balanced life with a wife, a family, a job, and hobbies.

Most people lead lives of quiet desperation, because they wait for some perfect or safe condition to arrive before they take action, a condition that never arrives. The best time to start reaching for your deepest desires is now.

Take the time to think about what is most important to you. Narrow your focus and commit 80 percent to 90 percent of your time to the three big things that are most important in your life. Let everything else fit in the 10 percent to 20 percent of time left. Let the truly sucky stuff fit in 5 percent of the time. If there's something you are passionate about and you can't find time for it, make time! Schedule it into a time block so you'll eliminate disruptions and distractions. Prioritize the one thing that's most important to you. Then your dream will become possible and achievable.

Now, go for it!

PART 2

MASTERING
PERFECT PRACTICE

CHAPTER 7

HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR PRACTICE SESSIONS

It goes without saying, anything you want to achieve takes time and practice. Not just any practice, though. Whether it's competing on the balance beam at the Olympics, playing a musical instrument, or performing your duties as a police officer, practicing the correct way is the key difference between good and great, gold and bronze—even life and death. How we practice defines how we perform. It is far more than simply preparing to compete; practice, itself, is a competitive activity! If you want to be the best at something, you must first be the best at practicing.

Too often, we waste time and get stuck with little or no progress because we never learned the most effective and efficient way to practice. In the following chapters, I am going to share with you the best way to practice to attain the optimal state of readiness and deliver your best performance. By following these steps, you'll build both confidence and competence in virtually any endeavor. They're not just theories; they're *practices*—and drawn from decades of perfecting my own practice, in everything from high-pressure stock trading and million-dollar business deals to public speaking and athletics.

You may never become an elite athlete and compete at the professional level. You may never play piano or sing at Carnegie Hall. You may never have to stand before billion-dollar investors to make the "pitch of your life." But there are probably sports you like to play and activities you enjoy that require skill. Maybe your day job requires you to make presentations to customers or to management within the company. Whoever you are and whatever you do, this section will help you perfect your "game" and become the best you can be—the champion of your own life!

PRACTICING THE RIGHT THINGS

You can learn to perform specific actions purely through repetition, without conscious thought. But if you're not careful, you can also teach yourself to do the wrong things. This is sometimes referred to as "bad muscle memory" or "training scars." This point is best illustrated by a story told by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman in his book *On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and Peace*. A police officer took it upon himself to practice disarming an attacker. At every opportunity he would have his wife, a friend, or a partner hold an unloaded pistol on him so he could practice snatching it away. He would snatch the gun, then hand it back, repeating the process over and over. One day, he and his law enforcement partner responded to an incident at a convenience store. The officer went down one aisle while his partner went down another. At the end of the first aisle, the suspect stepped around the corner and pointed a loaded gun at him. In the blink of an eye, the officer snatched the gun away from him, shocking the gunman with his speed and agility. No doubt this criminal was even more surprised and confused when the officer handed the gun right back to him just as he had in practice hundreds of times. Luckily, his partner shot the

suspect just as he was about to use the gun against him.

Why had all that practice failed him? Because the officer had practiced not only snatching away the gun, but also, unwittingly, giving it right back. Both actions had become engrained to the point of instinct. The lesson here: If you practice incorrectly, you could be perfecting counterproductive tendencies. In a stressful situation, you never rise to the occasion; you sink to the level of your training.

The old adage tells us that practice makes perfect—except it doesn't. Practice only makes a habit. It takes *perfect practice* to "make perfect." This applies to any type of performance—in sports, arts and entertainment, business, public speaking, and more. To succeed, you must learn how to practice the right things and in the correct way.

BEING MINDFUL OF YOUR MINDSET

We spend a lot of time doing things that we never get better at, like going to the gym, only to look in the mirror a year later only to see little or no progress. We took the time to train and practice, but still no meaningful improvement. What happened? The clues can be found in how we practice.

There are a few ways to practice. The first and most common way is to practice something over and over until you get it right. It's like that old saying, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." In the beginning this may help you develop a better skill set, although you're relying mostly on muscle memory from repetition to overcome poor performance. That's *not* perfect practice. **To accelerate your improvement and take your performance to the highest level, you need to practice in a way that builds both your physical and mental capacity, and in a way that strengthens your self-image.**

This starts with assigning as little mental weight as possible to failing results, while positively reinforcing your good results. All champions make mistakes—the shot is off; the jump doesn't land; the catch isn't made. Elite performers learn the lesson, adjust, and then *move on.* Champions focus on what they are doing right and put their mental energy there, as opposed to stressing over or dwelling on what they are doing wrong. This is crucial!

Obviously, we need our conscious minds for critical thinking and decision making. But for practice and performance, we need to train the subconscious to execute intuitively while downshifting the conscious mind into neutral. Why? During the heat of competition or a high-pressure situation, your conscious mind is where the "chatter" resides—the doubts and negative self-talk: "Am I going to blow this?" No matter how prepared you think you are, you can sabotage yourself with negative thinking and improper programming.

When you practice incorrectly and mindlessly, you lower your confidence. You become painfully aware that you don't really know how to produce the results you're hoping for. Real confidence under pressure comes from (1) being able to nail your performance consistently and (2) knowing that it's not a coincidence but that you can do it the correct way, because (3) you know precisely why you nail it or miss it. You have identified the key technical or mechanical factors that are necessary, and you know how to put yourself in a winning mindset on demand.

By incorporating the right mix of mental training with your physical training as you develop perfect practice, you will be prepared to execute flawlessly. Moreover, your mind will be equally prepared, focused, and ready to win.

THE V SESSION

Always structure your practice sessions so they start strong and end strong, with the

challenging stuff in the middle. I call it a “V session.” The “V,” formed by going from high point to low point to high point, traces the path of mental and physical mastery. Along the way, you’re building positive reminiscences that affirm achievement and create the mindset of a champion.

Let’s say you are practicing archery. To start off strong, you begin with something relatively easy, something you know you can do well from a relatively close distance. This gets you warmed up and in the groove. You’re hitting the bull’s-eye every time. The same would apply to practicing any sport or musical instrument. Your warm-up consists of doing activities or exercises that get the blood flowing, limber up your body and mind, and boost your confidence. That’s the first high point, at the left side of the V.

Then you move to something challenging, which puts you at the bottom of the V. If you’ve been practicing scales on the piano or playing a relatively simple piece of music that you’ve already mastered, now you move to a much more difficult composition. Or in the archery example, you move farther away from the target. Whatever the activity, you’re attempting something new or less familiar. Now you’re being tested! You’re making some mistakes, which is to be expected with a new skill. If you’re working with a coach, you’ll be receiving instruction and feedback. This is hard work!

But you don’t end your practice session here. You finish by returning to something that is relatively easy or that you’ve already mastered—back up the right side of the V. The reason is simple: While you’re building new skills, you’re also building a positive, confident self-image. As you know from our previous discussion in Chapter 3, self-image is crucial, because you’ll never perform better than your image of yourself. When you finish your practice session with something you’ve mastered, you’ll leave feeling confidence.

The V session is rooted in the “serial-position effect,” a term coined by Hermann Ebbinghaus (see Figure 7-1). Experiments showed that when participants are presented with a list of words, they tend to remember the first few and last few words and are more likely to forget those in the middle of the list. This explains why ABC and XYZ stand out the most in the alphabet. This same structure, with emphasis on the beginning and end, is what trains your body and your mind in practice—building skills and positive self-image.

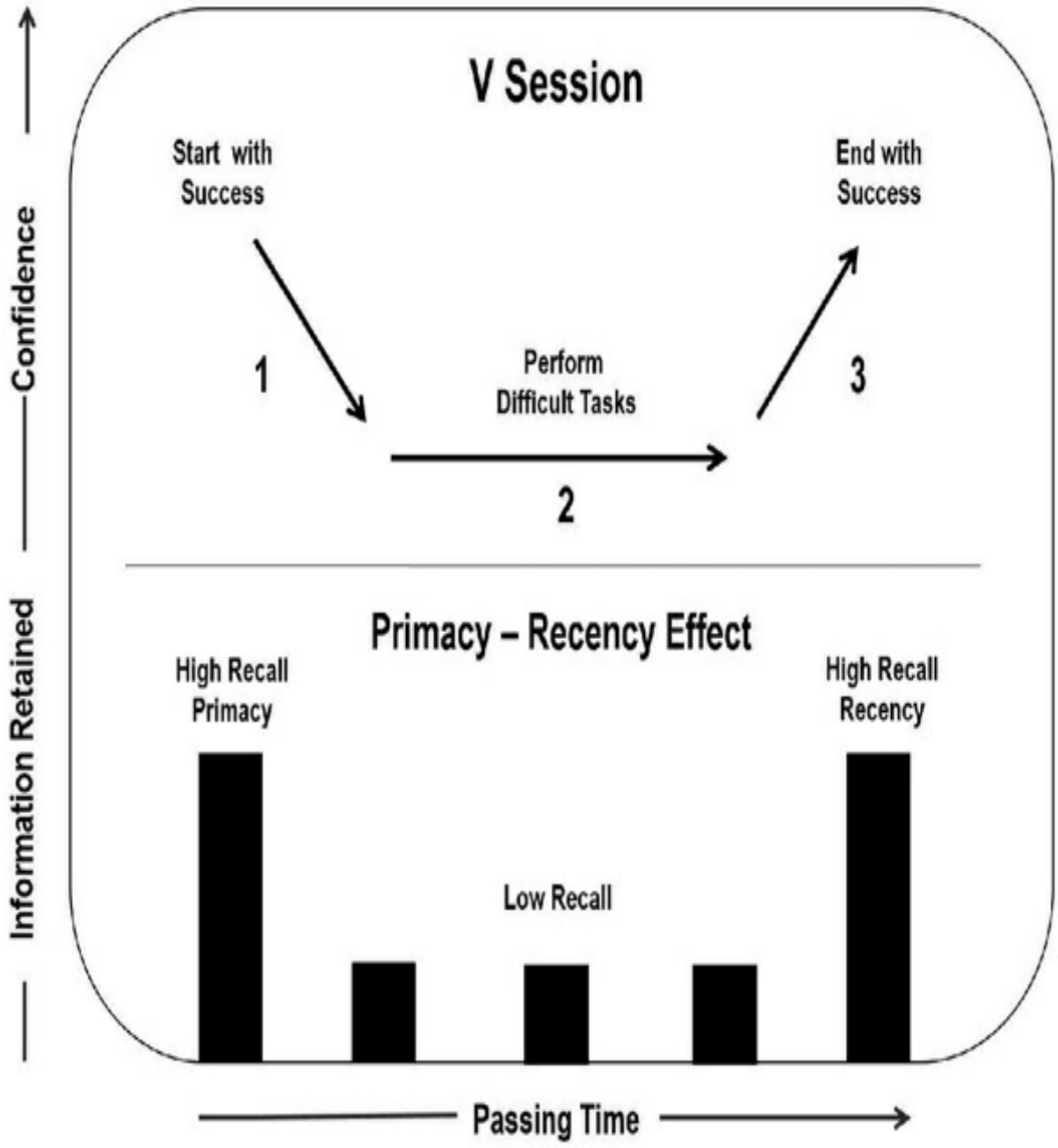


FIGURE 7-1 The V session starts with a relatively easy task, moves on to the more difficult parts, then ends with another easy task for a strong finish. This takes advantage of the serial-position effect, which is a person's tendency to recall the first and last events more vividly than the ones in the middle.

I always structure my training as a V session consisting of three intervals. If I have an hour to practice, I devote 15 minutes (the first interval) to warm up, doing easier activities; 30 minutes (the next interval), doing more difficult activities; and then 15 minutes (the third interval) to close, doing something that leaves me on a high note, feeling confident. For a 2-hour practice session, the intervals would be 30 minutes, 1 hour, then 30 minutes.

With a V session you're giving yourself that final memory of success, with the understanding that the end of any event or activity (the last five minutes of the game, the last day of vacation, the end of the movie) is what people remember most. Professor Teresa Amabile, coauthor of *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement and Creativity at Work*, said she found that the negative effect of a setback was more than twice as strong as the positive effect of an event that signaled progress. And the power of a

setback to increase frustration is more than three times stronger than the power of progress to decrease frustration.

Your takeaway here is to start and end on a high note so you always walk away with a healthy, undamaged self-image. **When you follow the V session approach, you achieve two-to-one positive practice intervals: double the number of perceived wins versus losses. And you'll be making progress with new skill development and challenges in the middle.**

This is programming your subconscious mind for success. By imprinting your subconscious with the first and last "picture" of your final victory, you'll increase self-confidence and remain motivated for your next practice session or competitive event. Start strong, deal with the hard stuff, and then make sure you leave on a strong note. Never send a loser home.

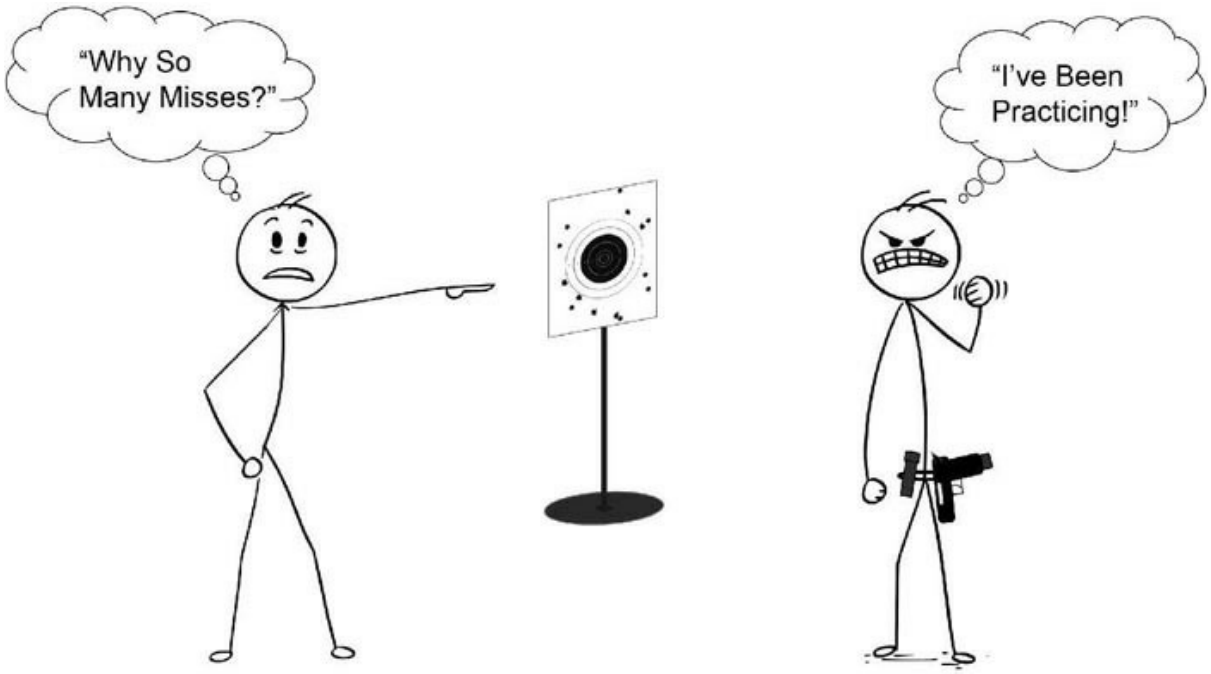
DON'T PERFECT A BAD HABIT TO CONQUER A GOOD PERFORMANCE

As you keep pushing yourself, you'll eventually get to a level where you struggle and maybe even fail. For example, when I started competitive pistol shooting, I began my V session with three easy-to-hit targets, getting all my shots in the optimal "A" zone. After the first part of my practice session, I challenged myself by moving the targets out farther. Instead of shooting a target at 10 yards away, I was now 20 or 25 yards away. Instead of drawing and shooting within three or four seconds, I cut my time down to two seconds. When I was new to the sport, this was a real challenge for me. Often, my shots were outside the "A" zone. I kept it up for a specific period of time; then as stated above, I moved to something easier or changed my approach.

Most people, though, just keep on struggling. Out of ego, they'll do the most difficult things over and over again. "I'm going to get this," they tell themselves. "I have to work on my weakness until I get it right . . . I'm not leaving until I nail this." They'll endure 19 failed attempts until finally, on the 20th try, they get it. Mission accomplished, right?

Wrong!

They've imprinted 19 failures and 1 victory. This was only an exercise in perfecting a bad habit, not conquering the good ones. That's not how elite performers practice. **The amount of time you spend on something affects your subconscious imprinting; the more you repeat something, the more you improve the probability that you will do it again. When you fail over and over again, you become an expert at failing.**



Maybe you tried to lose weight 10 times before and someone tells you about a new diet, but it won't work, because in your mind, it never worked before. There are 10 times that are evidence of failure. This is why positive thinking alone doesn't work. Exceptional performers understand that persistence is important, but you have to persist in the right way. Otherwise, you can "win the battle, but lose the war." **When we are pressed to perform, even if we visualize ourselves succeeding, what gives us the confidence to execute is the belief that we have done it before.** If you spend 30 minutes missing a target and end up hitting it once or twice over 5 or 10 minutes, your mind is going to imprint mostly misses and only a few successes. With every failed attempt, your self-image shrinks. Instead, you want to structure your practice sessions so that your mind sees and records progress and success, because the most important part of practicing is building confidence and skill, not just hitting your goal one out of ten times to satisfy your ego.

MANEUVERING AROUND PLATEAUS

Imagine you needed heart surgery and you must choose between two doctors. The only information you have is that one doctor has performed the procedure hundreds of times successfully and never lost a patient, while the other doctor failed several times. No question whom you would choose—past successes and failures mean a lot to you!

Now you understand why you must also position everything in your own mind around success. When you're in a high-pressure situation and you have to perform, you need the confidence that you've done it before. It's not just a fluke; you know you can nail it on command. Of course, you want to stretch yourself outside your comfort zone, but you must also learn how to maneuver around plateaus. As you run through your practice loop, at some point you'll get stuck. When you encounter these sticking points, creatively maneuver around them instead of just throwing more work at them.

You can do this by stressing your body and brain in new and different ways, but always protecting your self-image with progress and positive imprints. For example, you can increase your performance by 10 percent beyond your best level to push yourself for a breakthrough. At the same time, you alternate with something you may not normally do, such as decreasing your performance level by 30 percent while performing with perfect accuracy

and form. The goal is to have a process that gives you empowering feedback—not trying to learn lessons by getting it wrong over and over again.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

When you run into difficulty during practice, do not deny that you have a problem. Figure out the correct way to execute the task you are having an issue with and *also* the incorrect way. Then purposely perform the skill the wrong way. That's right, the wrong way! Observe what you are doing, and remember it. Then perform the skill the right way, making a mental note of what you have just done. Just like the wrong way, think it through and remember it. Then return to the incorrect way, and then the correct version again—bad, good, bad, good, repeatedly alternating between the correct way and the wrong way.

Why would you do such a thing?

Psychologically, you want a full understanding of the correct skill, but it is equally important to unlearn your bad habit. It may be that you have been practicing the incorrect version for a long time, so you cannot just drop it. You need to be able to recognize where you have gone wrong, and then, slowly and gently, remove it from your mental toolbox. **The purpose of the compare and contrast is not to state the obvious or to dwell on the negative, but rather to illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities and analyze the gap between them.** It's crucial to know your old technique and contrast it against the new correct technique so that when, or if, you fall back into the bad old habit, you can instantly identify and rectify the situation. With this technique, you will know precisely what you did wrong and what you need to do to get it right. And you will learn to view your mistakes less emotionally as lessons, not failures.

SHORTEN BAD SESSIONS AND EXTEND GOOD ONES

When you are having trouble nailing a routine or a particular task, move on and try something else. Later, you can come back to it fresh. More times than not, you perform better the second time around. If you are still having trouble or if the entire practice session is going poorly that day, cut the session short. This goes against the grain of how most people practice. They perform a task and then during their next practice session work on the areas that they were having trouble with more than what they were doing well. They get stubborn and keep trying to do the same thing, over and over, and experience the same failures, over and over. In my experience, the very best performers do the opposite.

High achievers understand the importance of building their self-image, so they avoid putting themselves into a deep rut on those days when they're off. They know that no good will come from a bad practice session, and they want to avoid driving that negative experience deep into their subconscious. They cut the session short and move on to something else or come back another day.

On the other hand, when things are going well, top performers let that session run! You should do the same. When you're in the groove and nailing a difficult task, there's no reason to stop or move on to something else. Keep going and drive that success deep into your nervous system. This is the kind of "perfect practice" that builds both skill and confidence. This is how elite performers are built. For example, the best time to practice long putts is right after you've sunk a few 30-footers. **When you're performing well, keep going. Lengthen your session. And when the session concludes, always focus on what went well.** This helps reinforce the best version of yourself and builds confidence.

Conversely, if you're on the driving range and you keep slicing, don't just keep hitting

bucket after bucket of balls. Figure out a way to succeed from a different perspective. I corrected my slice by focusing on doing the exact opposite of "fixing" my slice—I started working on making the "mistake" of hooking the ball. Once I could draw the ball, my slice was gone. When you get stuck, come at the problem from a different angle. Always give your mind more positive time than negative time, and position everything in a way that results in perceptions of success.

I apply this principle to my writing. I only write when I feel inspired, never forcing my thoughts. And when things are flowing, I keep writing. When they're not, I stop or take a break. It promotes confidence and creativity—because you can't operate successfully or creatively when you are unsure or tentative.

PICKING PRACTICE PARTNERS

In many activities—for example, running or working out—many people like to have a partner to help them stay engaged and motivated. Ideally, their buddy will make sure they're ready to run those five miles at six o'clock in the morning or be at the driving range at seven in the evening to hit a bucket of balls. But how do you pick a partner? If you choose someone who is less skilled than you are, you won't learn much. If you pick someone who is much better than you are, you could get discouraged and your confidence will suffer.

The secret to practicing with partners is having the right mix. One-third of the time, practice with someone who is less skilled, one-third with someone who is equally skilled, and one-third with someone who is more skilled. When you practice with someone less skilled, your ego gets a boost and you imprint confidence in your self-image. When you're with someone at your level, you can gauge how you're progressing—friendly competition that's fun and encourages both of you. And when you're with someone who is so much better, you stretch and learn. In addition, there's something magical about practicing with different people: You develop a "social" practice skill that helps you adjust, stretch, and try new things.

BREAK IT DOWN

Most routines or activities are composed of several parts or maneuvers. Think of performing a floor routine in gymnastics or executing a play in basketball, ice hockey, or football—each requires many different maneuvers, strategies, and tactics. In the same way, if you can break down what you're trying to master into smaller segments, you'll help yourself when you get stuck or frustrated. Don't focus on the whole thing; break it into parts. For example, if you play soccer, practice dribbling down the field, then passing, and then firing shots at the goal. Later you can put everything together during a scrimmage game or actual competition.

Practicing each movement or part until you have it down will create incremental mastery; then you can bring it all together. **It's easier to comprehend and execute a new skill when you master one small task or procedure at a time. Over time, you string together each step as part of one coordinated process.**

When I worked with a tennis coach on my serve, we broke it down into several parts. First, we started with the toss—literally just throwing the ball into the air for 20 minutes each practice session. While that might seem like a small and obvious movement, any tennis player will tell you that the toss is absolutely key. I can still remember my coach telling me to think of the ball as a fragile egg as I tossed it into the air, careful not to impart any spin. Then we moved on to the upswing, pronation, contact with the ball, and the follow-through—each a separate component of the serve. And the serve, itself, was only one of many parts of

playing tennis that I had to master: backhand, forehand, overhead lob, etc. By breaking it down, I learned to execute each component correctly and conquered the "pieces" before moving on to mastering the game.

AVOID BEING AN "AVOIDER"

When I first started competing in shooting competitions, I was having problems with too many "mics" (misses off target). I realized with only 5 percent less mics, I would have won many of the competitions instead of coming in second, third, or fourth. By troubleshooting (pardon the pun), I found that those mics were causing me to lose; if I had erased them, I would have won. As a result, my goal became to avoid mics.

There were two problems with that goal. First, I had been focusing on the problem instead of the solution, and that rarely, if ever, produces a great result. When you tell yourself, "Don't miss," what do you picture in your mind? Missing! Instead of focusing on not missing, I needed to focus on hitting the "A" zone (the highest-point scoring area of the target).

The other problem with "not missing" is that it's a vague goal and not a real solution. Just because I don't *miss* targets doesn't mean the shots put on target are going to be very accurate. Maybe I would start getting a large number of "D" hits and, thus, avoid missing. But that would be at the expense of getting my "A" hits and defeat the purpose.

Most people who want to succeed have conflicting priorities. They would like to win, but they also want to avoid being embarrassed or finishing last. So they trade off not finishing last for not finishing first.

Sports psychologist Bob Rotella said, "If you hate three-putting and your ultimate goal is to avoid making three putts, you'll two-putt your life away." He tells his golfing clients, "You better love one-putting more than you hate three-putting." Bob wants them to envision every shot going in the hole—just like I envision every shot hitting the "A" zone or a basketball player visualizes the ball going in the net. Will you hit every shot perfectly? Probably not. But if you want to be great, that had better be your goal.

I realized that if I focused on putting my shots in the "A" zone, I could simultaneously improve my misses and my scoring. Best of all, I now had a picture in my head of what I needed to accomplish, because no one ever won a gold medal envisioning what not to do. If I wanted to shoot like a champion, I had to envision every shot in the "A" zone and not even think about missing.

If you want to perform like the best, you need to practice like the best—and that means learning how to get the most out of your training with perfect practice.

Just as everyone does, the elite experience setbacks, mishaps and failures, but with a strong self-image strengthened through the right kind of practice, they suffer little esteem damage.

By incorporating the training drills in this chapter into your routine, you'll not only expand your skills and increase your competence; you'll also gain confidence and build your self-image. It's all part of building and mastering a winning mindset.

CHAPTER 8

VISUALIZATION AND REHEARSAL

No man fears to do that which he knows he does well.

—DUKE OF WELLINGTON

The human body has approximately 11 million sensory receptors, about 10 million of which are dedicated to sight, the most powerful sensory ability. Even the slightest shift in what we see can influence how we think. So it makes sense that visual cues are the greatest catalyst of human behavior. In the same vein, we can create and re-create images of events in our minds, even though they occurred at some other time and place or maybe haven't occurred yet. It's called "visualization." Our imagination can re-create the past in great detail or transform it to fit a desired emotional state. It can project us into the future, solve problems, reduce mental pressure, and help maximize performance. No wonder visualization is such a powerful tool for helping you improve in anything and everything you do.

Every elite performer understands the importance of imagery, visualization, or mental practice. In one well-known study of Olympic athletes, when asked whether they used visualization before competition, nearly all athletes (99 percent) responded affirmatively. Mental imagery is not daydreaming about the great athlete or performer you would like to be or wishful thinking about how well you would like to perform. It's a learned skill that requires concentration and discipline—and the results are well established.

In a study that integrated mental trading with physical training, four matched groups of world-class Soviet athletes were trained for many hours each week. The training regimens were as follows:

Group A. 100 percent physical training
Group B. 75 percent physical, 25 percent mental training
Group C. 50 percent physical, 50 percent mental training
Group D. 25 percent physical, 75 percent mental training

When the four groups were compared, Group D showed significantly greater improvement than Group C, with Groups B and A following in that order. This demonstrates that mental training is at least as important as physical training, while some studies suggest it's even more important.

Research at Harvard University found that students who visualized in advance performed tasks with nearly 100 percent accuracy, whereas students who didn't visualize achieved only 55 percent accuracy. The beautiful thing about visualization is you can mentally imprint your performances perfectly as many times as you want. You can even do things that you've never done before. Your performances are limited only by the creativity of your thinking.

One thing is for certain: If you're not using some form of mental training, you're at a competitive disadvantage to those who do. **Using mental imagery is particularly effective because you literally "think" with your muscles and can trick your subconscious mind**

into "seeing" events as if they were actually occurring.

If you want to build a reliable mental "blueprint" that you can fall back on during actual performance, start with visualization and incorporate mental rehearsal sessions into your repertoire of training tools. As you learn to control imagery in your mind's eye, your muscles gain greater control and your confidence grows.

There are three types of mental imagery:

Internal. As the name implies, internal imagery is from the inside out. This involves rehearsing and visualizing what you actually see through your eyes. For example, if you were a race car driver, you would see everything around you as if you were looking through your helmet visor, seeing all the things you would see through the windshield as you drive.

External. It's called external imagery because it's perceived as being external to you; in other words, everything is perceived from the outside like an observer. You're watching yourself as if you were filming a movie or you were a spectator in the audience. Maybe your vantage point is from a distance, as if you were in the stands at a football game, or perhaps it's much closer, as if a camera were following you around.

Kinesthetic. This third type of mental imagery involves feel. For example, you are practicing downhill skiing in your living room with poles in your hands. Or in competitive shooting, we "air-gun" the moves as we rehearse the shooting stages.

The most effective visualization occurs when you combine all three types of imagery. This is key, because the subconscious does not distinguish between what is real and what is a suggestion. It will take whatever the conscious mind "tells" it as fact. This is why visualization is a powerful tool to program your subconscious (so be careful what you imagine). In a relaxed state, you can imagine yourself being successful—whether winning the race, making the shot, nailing the presentation, etc. If you actually feel the emotions attached to that victory, that's even better. The images plus emotion makes the experience even more real to the subconscious. Strong emotional content will help drive the image deep into your subconscious where it gets anchored in your nervous system.

If you were able to imagine that you ran a dozen marathons, and you envisioned each one in detail—the pounding of the pavement, the feeling of the warmth of the sun, the cheering of the crowd—you'd gain the confidence of having done exactly that. Let's assume you're a tennis player and you want more power out of your serve. The next step is to picture yourself serving with more power. Another way to do this is to watch and absorb someone who generates a lot of power. Feel the rhythm and the sound and watch the result. Then picture yourself as the server with the same result.

Research indicates that when individuals imagine vividly, their brains interpret these images identically to the actual stimulus situation. It's like when you have a dream and it feels so real to you. It's completely imaginary—there are no monsters chasing you. But when you wake up, you're breathing heavily, you're perspiring, and you're frightened. It wasn't real, but your mind didn't know the difference between an intensely imagined sequence and reality.

In the same way, an alpine skier can imagine herself skiing a downhill run. Her brain will interpret the images and fire the muscles in her legs as if she were skiing the course. Athletes and coaches understand this, which is why visualization and mental imagery are among the most researched areas in sports. From golfers to basketball players, athletes know that to make the shot you first have to "see" the shot. **Jack Nicklaus said, "I never hit a shot, not even in practice, without having a very sharp picture of it in my head."** In his book *Golf My Way*, Nicklaus describes exactly how he put this principle into action: "First, I see the ball where I want it to finish. Then I see the ball going there: its path, trajectory, and shape, even

its behavior on landing. Then there's sort of a fade-out, and the next scene shows me making the kind of swing that will turn the previous images into reality."

Mental practice and physical practice work best when used together. However, if for some reason you are unable to practice physically, mental practice is far better than no practice at all. There's a story of a rifle shooter who was delayed en route to a competition due to weather. Knowing he was going to miss his practice rounds, he mentally rehearsed during his flight, practicing rounds in his head. He visualized himself systematically loading his rifle and shooting each of 200 shots in exactly the same manner as he would in the competition. He arrived just in time to compete. Prepared and ready, he proceeded to shoot his best score.

YOU'LL PERFORM IT WHEN YOU SEE IT

There are many inspiring stories about visualization, particularly in sports. One frequently cited example is an experiment involving two groups of basketball players practicing free throws. The players in the experiment were of equal free throwing shooting ability. One group practiced free throws for an hour, several times a week. The other group got together and visualized free throws for an hour, several times a week, but didn't do any actual shooting. At the end of the study, the group that did the visualization performed better in a free throw competition against those who practiced.

A team of Harvard researchers took a group of volunteers who never before played the piano and divided them in half. The first group practiced a simple five-finger piano exercise for two hours a day over a five-day period. The remaining half also "practiced," except these

volunteers only imagined they played the piano; they never physically moved their fingers. Brain scans taken before and after showed that *both groups* created new neural circuits and new neurological programming in the region of their brains that controls finger movements, even though one group only "practiced" by thought, but never lifted a finger. The group of people who mentally rehearsed had brain changes that mirrored the changes of those who physically practiced.

Another team of researchers from Ohio University went so far as to wrap the wrists of 29 volunteers in surgical casts for one month. Half the group practiced mental imagery exercises for 11 minutes a day, five days a week, imagining they were flexing their immobilized wrist muscles while actually remaining completely still. The other half, the control group, did nothing. At the end of the month, when all the casts came off, the muscles of the imagery group were twice as strong as those of the control group.

These studies show that mental rehearsal not only changes the brain; it can also change the body. When the imagination can see and feel the desired outcome, that projection becomes expectancy. **The basketball player expects to make a high percentage of free throws because the visualized "practice" was so effective—it's as if the player has been there before.** This is very important in the heat of competition or a pressure-filled event when the subconscious must take over. In an Olympic downhill race, the ski racer goes into subconscious mode right out of the gate. Decisions are split-second—total instinct all the way through the run.

Long-time ski champions such as Lindsey Vonn not only use their minds in visualization, but also their hands and bodies—moving with the motion and using their hands to mimic the path of the skis. Golfing is obviously a calmer sport than downhill racing, but it's an intensely mental game. It's so easy to become hijacked by your thinking. Golfers use a variety of visualization techniques, from "feeling" the right pressure on the grip of the club to "seeing" the ball roll into the cup for a perfect putt.

When your subconscious has been purposefully imprinted with positive outcomes, you will perform far better than if you rely on conscious thought alone. Therefore, getting a clear picture in your mind of your desired result is the best way to communicate with the subconscious. Repetitive mental routines shift the focus from conscious thought into the subconscious. As four-time Olympian and gold medalist Mac Wilkins noted, "If you're trying to accomplish something . . . if you can't visualize it, then it's pure chance you will be able to perform." **When you practice, you must work on the "how to" and let the conscious mind train the subconscious. Then, during competition or a performance, you can let go, trust your training, and let the magic happen.**

Now, it's time for you to learn how to apply this invaluable skill.

GUIDELINES FOR VISUALIZATION AND MENTAL REHEARSAL

1. Practice Fully

Mental rehearsal should be practiced just as you would physically execute your routine, performance, or sequence of movements. Make sure you include your pre-performance routine and post-performance celebration. You can use internal or external imagery or switch back and forth from one to the other—from "outside" as if you were a spectator viewing yourself to "inside" as if you were looking through your eyes as you performed. **When you visualize and rehearse your performance in your head, see the event exactly how you want it to unfold. Feel the excitement of successfully fulfilling your goal.** If your mental images turn negative, stop and restart; then visualize the performance again. Make sure you

focus on what you want to see happen and always picture yourself with a successful outcome. Put yourself into a mindset of experiencing your full capabilities; then see yourself surpassing your best performance. Feel the emotion; hear the sounds; smell the smells. Bring all your senses to the performance and put yourself deeply into the experience, as if it were really happening.

2. Practice in Real Time

Your mental rehearsal should be visualized at the same rhythm and tempo that you would perform physically. The reason is that you want the neurological pattern established through imagery to mirror the same process and pace you need for actual performance. When a skill or routine is new, you could slow down the imagery to help you learn and absorb it. But only do this until the skill is memorized; then bring it up to actual speed. Practicing too much in slow motion during mental rehearsal can create errors in the actual execution. As you are practicing in your mind, you can use a timer or watch a video of an actual performance to stay on the pace at which you wish to perform.

3. Always Include Movement

An important requirement of mental rehearsal is that the images *must include movement.* In his study of the effects of mental rehearsal on 53 alpine skiers, Swedish sports psychologist Lars-Eric Unestahl found that the most positive results were obtained when the athletes created mental images of *action* rather than of static postures. Think of visualization as a "mental workout," not just "still shots" or frozen images. If you are new to visualization, your tendency may be to "freeze-frame" certain images of posture or execution. **The most effective way to mentally rehearse is to tell your body what to do by thinking yourself through your performance from start to finish.** In one study, the highest number of negative results came from those who created mental images of specific static postures. Positive results came from those who visualized *moving mental images*. Research has shown that movement creates the proper "neurological tracks" for optimal performance.

4. Contingency Plan

In preparing for whatever can occur during your competition or performance, you can use mental imagery as well. Your mental rehearsal should end successfully, but not always start perfectly. If you always imagine that you execute everything perfectly, you set yourself up for failure. If you do not envision dealing with the inevitable slip-up or unexpected obstacle, you won't know how to handle it. If you have made a mistake in a recent performance, you need to replay that competition in your head, over and over, until you see yourself getting through it successfully.

The more unknowns you can reveal about every detail and dimension you might encounter, the better prepared you will be. Handling anything that might occur and still achieving success is an important part of mental rehearsal. **In your mind's eye, see and feel yourself execute the task without the error. Then envision the worst scenario and mentally rehearse dealing with it effectively.** But make sure that your rehearsal is realistic and within your reach. Goal setting and imagery go hand in hand in your mental preparation.

My good friend Harry Collins, a jujitsu instructor, described the worst-case scenario when facing a competitor: "He's got my back with both hooks in [legs wrapped around] and he's about to rear naked choke me. I would want to avoid that at all costs." If you were an MMA (mixed martial arts) fighter, you would mentally train by visualizing yourself in that scenario, then see yourself working through it in a controlled manner with a successful

outcome. Or let's say you were a figure skater: You'd prepare yourself for recovering from a fall, visualizing how you get up and successfully continue and complete the routine. Understand that this is *not* rehearsing falling down—only recovering and coping with the fall.

5. Start and End with Imagery

Many athletes find that doing mental practice just before falling asleep is very effective. Bob Bowman, who has been Michael Phelps's coach since the Olympic swimmer was a teenager, included visualization as a part of Phelps's mental training. Bowman instructed Phelps to watch a "mental videotape" of his races every day before he went to sleep and when he woke up in the morning. Phelps would visualize every aspect of swimming a successful race, from the starting blocks to the celebration after he won that race.

Personally, I like to do mental rehearsal first thing when I get up in the morning, right before I'm about to compete at an event or perform on stage, and again before I go to sleep. With some sports or events, you have to do all the mental preparation prior to competition as there is no time for you to practice once the event has started. But if your event allows you to engage in mental rehearsal immediately prior to your performance, take advantage of that. **Anytime you can sit quietly and shut out distractions, you can rehearse mentally. Make use of such periods throughout your day for mental practice.**

6. Prime Your Practice

Visualization and mental rehearsal should be used in preparation for practice sessions as well as competition. If possible, engage in physical practice right after your mental rehearsal. You'll likely improve more rapidly when you combine mental practice with actual physical practice in the same session. If you have trouble with a task or movement, stop and rehearse it in your mind, exactly as you want it to occur. This is what I call rehearsing a correction. Do this mental rehearsal at least five times. Then go back and run through your routine again; if you fail, repeat the process.

Here's how I apply this to my competitive shooting practice. If I fail to group my shots in the "A" zone, I unload the gun and rehearse the shot sequence five times ("dry-fire"). Then I reload and run it again with live ammo. If I miss again, I unload and rehearse the correction five more times "dry." Using this technique balances the success-failure ratio, because I can completely control what goes on in my mind during rehearsal and guarantee a successful outcome.

7. Practice with Intention

Make all your practice sessions purposeful and systematic—not just mindless repetitions. To accomplish that, your practice requires focused attention with the specific goal of improving performance. Whether in mental rehearsal or physical practice, just running through the motions isn't the same thing as being deliberate or purposeful in your practice. **Before you start your practice session, ask yourself, "What do I want to accomplish today?"** Have a goal and a plan for what you want to achieve and stay true to that intention throughout your practice session. If you need clarity, before you practice write down some goals that you can refer to during your practice session or have a coach help you.

8. Practice Smarter, Not Necessarily Longer

You will accomplish much more in a short amount of time if you have a very focused objective. Science tells us that we have a limited amount of willpower to draw on, so make

the most of the time you have. Say you are having trouble with two tricky parts of a routine. Set a timer for a reasonable period (15 or 20 minutes) and work only on that one issue in as many ways as you can and in ways that allow you to succeed. Break it down into smaller and more manageable bits; change the rhythm; do whatever you need to do. Keep in mind that you want to engrain good habits, not perfect poor ones. Experience success in even a small portion of your routine or activities so that you can build on that success. Also, given the choice between the two, you should favor more frequent, shorter sessions than infrequent, long practice sessions.

9. Challenge Yourself

To push beyond your current capabilities, imagine it first. See yourself performing at a level above your best performance. Push yourself outside your physical comfort zone by getting a clear picture of what you want to accomplish and precisely how you are going to do it. Visualize achieving success despite a challenging or worst-case scenario. If you have trouble performing in hot weather, visualize yourself in hot and humid conditions, responding positively and feeling comfortable and in control in that "uncomfortable" setting. If you always visualize yourself in favorable conditions, you won't be prepared for environmental distractions and discomfort. **Ask yourself, "What is the scariest or most intimidating thing I'm going to face?" Then visualize it and see yourself performing well under those conditions.** Take that thinking to the actual event. In time, you'll become a true master of your mind and create a new expanded comfort zone.

10. Make It a Habit

Mental rehearsal gets better with repetition. Practice your visualization or imagery daily, whenever you can. Your mental rehearsal sessions should be no different from a practice session. Whenever possible, go through an entire practice session (in real time) in your head as mental rehearsal. Canadian bobsledder Lyndon Rush credited imagery with helping him stay focused throughout the arduous four years of training between the 2010 and 2014 Olympic Games. He explained, "I've tried to keep the track in my mind throughout the year. I'll be in the shower or brushing my teeth. It just takes a minute, so I do the whole thing or sometimes just the corners that are more technical. You try to keep it fresh in your head, so when you do get there, you are not just starting at square one. It's amazing how much you can do in your mind."

MATCH SIMULATION

I practice as if I'm playing the game, so when the moment comes in the game, it's not new to me.

—MICHAEL JORDAN

If you really want to fully prepare yourself for a competition or an event, you should consider one of my favorite training techniques I call "match simulation." As the name implies, it involves rehearsing in conditions that mirror as closely as possible the real venue and performance conditions you will likely experience.

On May 2, 2011, U.S. Special Forces raided an al-Qaeda compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, and eliminated the world's most wanted terrorist: Osama bin Laden. The entire operation, which lasted only 40 minutes from start to finish, was the culmination of years of calculated planning and training. The team began intense rehearsal for the operation, which

included practicing the operation over and over in a full-scale replica of the bin Laden compound. The replica was located at Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan, and the Navy SEALs practiced there for weeks, preparing for every detail they would confront—right down to where the doorknobs were located and which way the doors opened, so there were as few surprises as possible.

Similarly, your objective is to use simulation to practice skills in realistic conditions, then transfer those skills to competition or other real-life situations. As a result, when you get to that moment, you won't have to think. You will feel like you have been there before, and things will instinctually happen.

At the Johnson Space Center, astronaut candidates go through intensive training before being selected and deployed for space missions. Highly realistic mock-ups are used, including the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory, the world's largest indoor swimming pool that holds 6.2 million gallons of water and is more than 200 feet long and 40 feet deep. Deep within the pool, which simulates the weightlessness of space, astronauts train for spacewalks on full-sized replicas of space station modules. They spend approximately 10 hours under water for every hour they will spend walking in space. Before their first mission, astronauts typically train for a combined total of 300 hours in simulators.

This type of detailed preparation is no different from a dress rehearsal for a Broadway play or a wedding rehearsal. **The object of rehearsing is to get as close to the actual performance conditions as possible.** The more you can bring to that rehearsal, the more prepared you will be for the actual event. Olympic medalist Steve Backley said, "I used to pretend that I was throwing in the Olympic final, standing next to the greatest javelin throwers of all time. It seemed to give me an edge and increase my concentration and intention . . . it made the art of competitive javelin throwing much more fun."

The more mentally and physically prepared you are, the better your "game time" performance will be. **Maybe you can't re-create a competitive arena or a performance stage in your backyard or your living room. But you can create any course or routine in your mind—and you can do that anywhere and anytime.**

Before the 1976 Summer Olympics, representatives of the Soviet Union shot pictures of the Olympic facilities in Montreal. Back in the Soviet Union, these pictures were studied by the athletes to create images of themselves performing in those facilities. Creating these types of images served to familiarize the athletes with the Olympic environment before they arrived.

When you practice mentally, rehearse your entire performance under the competitive conditions you expect and the environment in which it will take place. The more familiar you are with all the details of the performance and the environment, the more prepared you'll be—and the better you'll perform.

Mental imagery allows you to visualize detailed performance conditions when you can't physically re-create something. Using visualization, you can rehearse everything from start (including your pre-performance routine) to finish (including your victory celebration). You can do this with everything: sales calls, presentations on stage, or performances in sports or the arts.

The more you properly prepare, the better you'll perform. That starts with structuring your practice sessions with the use of visualization, mental rehearsal, and match simulation.

SIMULATING STRESS

When people practice in a casual environment with nothing on the line, they aren't fully prepared for what happens when it's "game time." Suddenly finding themselves facing real-time stress, they often choke under pressure. To prepare yourself, you need to practice under

the types of pressure you are likely to face during a performance. This will help you elevate your performance to a high level when it really counts. Of course, the best practice is engaging in as many real-life scenarios as possible and getting actual experience. But even practicing under mild levels of stress can prevent you from choking at the next high-stakes event.

In one study, a group of police officers was divided in two. Half practiced shooting at live opponents while under fire—not using real bullets, but bullets made of soap. The other half practiced shooting at static cardboard targets. In subsequent testing, the live training group outperformed the static "no-pressure" group.

Gavin de Becker, who is the author of *The Gift of Fear* and runs a security firm in Los Angeles, conducts an exercise in which trainees repeatedly confront a ferocious dog. "In the beginning, their heart rate is 175 to 200. They can't see straight, then the second or third time it's 120, and then it's 110 and they can function." That kind of repetitive training conducted in combination with real-world experiences fundamentally changes the way police officers react to a violent encounter. The officers become conditioned so they can think clearly and perform according to their training.

Here's another example. In March 2007, Roger Reid took over as head coach of Southern Utah University basketball team. In the middle of practice, when the players were least expecting it, Reid would stop everything and immediately send his players to the free throw line. If the player made the shot, he got a chance to catch his breath. A missed shot meant a sprint around the court. When Reid arrived at Southern Utah, he inherited a team that ranked 217th in free throw percentage. As of 2009, Southern Utah ranked number one, shooting just above 80 percent. Even though having to sprint because of a missed shot didn't create a huge amount of pressure, mild stress during training proved beneficial because it accustomed the players to performing with something on the line.

And in a laboratory test at the University of Chicago, golfers who learned to putt in front of an audience were less anxious and performed better under stress than those who never practiced in front of onlookers. What these examples all show is that training under pressure (even if it's mild pressure) can do more than just get you used to stress. It can also help you get accustomed to the "overtrying" that often accompanies high-stress situations where you feel the need to impress. Therefore, it may be more beneficial if you practice while friends look on than practicing alone—especially if you're practicing in front of people you want to impress or who would be embarrassed for you if you didn't do well.

Even simulating low levels of stress helps prevent cracking under pressure. People who practice this way learn to stay calm and collected in the face of scrutiny and judgment. They become accustomed to the pressure and learn how to detach from the environmental distraction.

Here are a few ways to practice and prepare for pressure:

- Practice under conditions that match as closely as possible the conditions you wil facing.
- When you can, practice in front of an audience.
- Practice while being recorded.
- Practice in the mirror.
- Go live on Facebook with your followers during your practice sessions.

MORE THAN JUST REPETITION

By now, it should be clear why it's not sufficient to just do the same thing over and over.

That’s not practice—only forming habits, and too often bad ones. If you want to perform perfectly, you need to practice perfectly—making adjustments to improve your execution while building your confidence. Hard work? Yes, of course! But so is anything worth achieving.

Before the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, social psychologists Jacqueline Golding, PhD, and Steven Ungerleider, PhD, surveyed 1,200 track and field athletes who qualified for the Olympic trials. The researchers specifically compared athletes who qualified for the Olympic Games with those who nearly qualified but missed. The athletes were nearly identical in every aspect of their training except for one thing: Athletes who made the team and competed in the Olympics were doing more mental practice in the final stages of preparation than those who failed to make the cut.

There are more than 100 research studies documenting the effects of mental practice and imagery and athletic performance. The research shows that elite athletes create mental focus plans for competition and mentally practice these plans regularly, so they are prepared to respond productively to various competitive stressors.

But you don’t have to be an elite athlete to put the power of visualization to work for you. Every morning, before I get up, I visualize a golden field with my desk sitting at the other end, right in the middle. As I mentally rehearse my day’s intention with a successful outcome, I walk through the field, smell the fresh air, and feel the warmth of the sun on my face. I visualize my day and mentally run through how I’m going to deal with issues I’m about to face. Then I get up and go to work.

CHAPTER 9

PREPARING FOR YOUR BIG DAY

Public speaking and performing in front of an audience are said to be the biggest fears reported by many American adults. It's not easy getting mentally prepared to give a big presentation or to compete in an important event. The stakes can feel high, and in our desire for things to go well, the anticipation builds. Fear, anxiety, or even paralysis can kick in. When the buzzer is about to sound or the curtain is ready to rise, your heart begins to race. Your palms sweat, it's hard to breathe, and you start thinking of all the things that could go wrong. Everything is going too fast. What started out completely under control, with a well-thought-out game plan, falls apart. Has this ever happened to you?

Elite competitors and world-class performers are different. When the pressure is on, they can dig deep and perform when it is asked of them, and not just when they feel up to it. They are totally engrossed in the task at hand, without any distraction or doubt in their minds. The rest of us, though, may feel as if we're ready and at the top of our game; then when the moment arrives and performance matters most, we do our *worst.* There are several reasons why this occurs:

1. We rarely practice under actual performance conditions. As a result, when the big day arrives and we are expec perform, we fail because we've established a comfort zone that doesn't match the reality of a high-stakes pre scenario.
2. We lose both focus and confidence because we don't have a consistent pre-performance routine that kee insulated from environmental distractions.
3. We worry about the outcome and repeating past mistakes for fear of being embarrassed and looking foolish. leads to anxiety and overarousal. Adrenaline surges, our heart rate soars, and, as a result, our cognitive functio severely impaired.
4. We fail to recognize and take control of our internal communication, body posture, mental images, and emotions. result, we self-sabotage through auto-neurotic thinking and self-defeating behavior.
5. We fail to let go and trust our training. Instead, we overtry, which blocks our instinctive skills developed d practice. Our conscious mind overthinks and gets in the way of our subconscious.

AWARENESS, THEN PREPAREDNESS

An enormously important part of becoming a champion and effectively dealing with pressure is self-awareness. It's not just a quality of champions; it's a habit. To properly prepare, you must first become aware. Most important, you need to become aware of what I call the "gap"—that is, the difference between where you are in practice and where you are in actual performance. If you're like most people, your practice sessions entail far less perceived pressure than when you're actually performing or competing in an event. If so, it's understandable why you would feel unprepared and anxious when facing the pressures of real-life challenges. Your practice has been unrealistic. So what's the sense of practicing long and hard if you're not practicing in a way that truly prepares you for the inevitable?

Being unaware of a problem is the most detrimental. A mistake points to what needs work. But not knowing about a mistake leaves you in a no-win situation, because you can't

correct a problem you don't know exists. In the same way, being aware of the thoughts in your head and your feelings will help you observe patterns of behavior that lead to superior performance, as well as other patterns that lead to a decline in performance.

Most of us, though, are not really aware of our thoughts just prior to performance time or how self-oriented they may be. **We have a tendency to gravitate to negative thinking when faced with a high-pressure situation. That's why it's imperative to take an audit of your mind prior to performing.** It's essential that you become highly aware of the thoughts you're processing. Top performers are able to step outside themselves and monitor what's going on, and they do this much more systematically than mediocre performers. It becomes a habit, an established part of their routine.

Measuring the Gap

As you audit your mind, you may notice a considerable difference between what you're thinking and how you feel before you practice versus when you are under pressure in a real performance. With this awareness, you can close the gap between the two. You learn how to relax and tune out distractions during practice, and (as we'll discuss in Chapter 10) you have a pre-performance ritual that allows you to achieve that same level of focus during actual performance.

The goal is not just to learn how to execute a maneuver or a task in practice. You must do the same thing when everything is on the line. You're facing intense pressure, and you must get it right this one time. Closing the gap between practice and performance is the only way to prepare yourself to perform at the highest level when you're under the gun (see Figure 9-1). This is much more important than only learning the physical movements or parts. **Your goal is to reach the point that, when you perform, it doesn't feel any different from what you experienced in practice.**

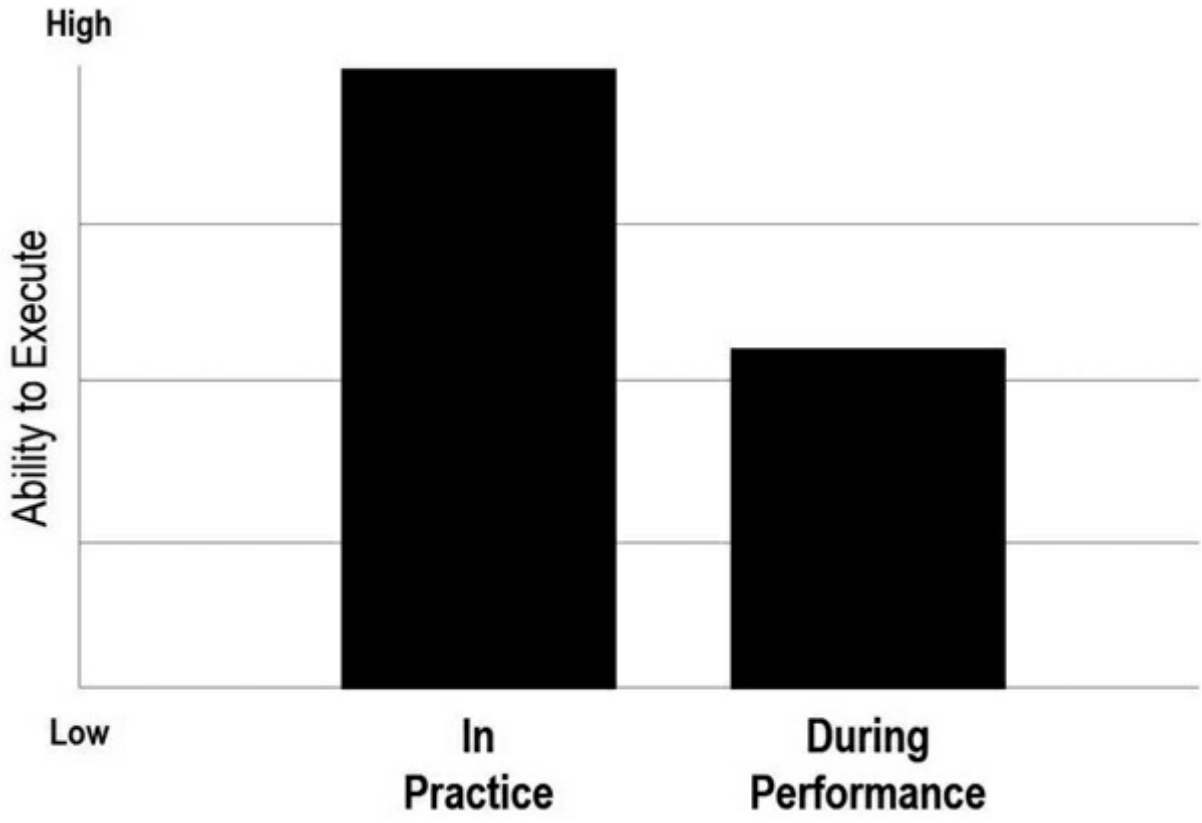


FIGURE 9-1 Become mindful of "the gap" in how well you can execute in practice versus during actual performance. The

bigger the gap, the more you need to replicate performance pressures and stress during your practice to become better prepared physically, mentally, and emotionally.

In this chapter I'm going to show you how to get into the optimal state prior to any performance—whether you're an MMA fighter about to go into the "cage" or you're going into a client meeting and you need to nail that presentation. It's a little more than just getting psyched or pumped up to play football or to become calm and collected to perform classical piano. Through specific strategies and a good understanding of what causes underperformance and how to counteract it, you can empower yourself and hone self-discipline as you get ready for your big day.

THE ROOT OF PERFORMANCE BREAKDOWN

Most of us have, at one point or other, experienced a breakdown in performance or choked under pressure. A racing heartbeat, dry mouth, butterflies in your stomach, cold and clammy hands, weakness, and the inability to focus and think clearly are all "symptoms" of the pressure and stress impacting your body and mind. Understanding arousal and its effects on performance is the first step in dealing with the perceived stress that comes with a high-stakes performance. Think of arousal like the energy generated by a car engine. When the car is in motion and the speed or energy generated by the engine is too much for the road conditions, driving performance gets disrupted—and in some cases, there's a crash!

As a protection mechanism to ensure our own survival and well-being, we are hardwired to look at what's wrong. Our "animal mind" gets engaged purely by instinct: fear, when it senses a threat; hostility, if it senses its territory is invaded. Most of us don't have an actual threat to our lives, but our nervous system continually triggers the experience of threat. It can happen sometimes if someone just says a critical word to us.

Whether facing a predator or a rival from within its own kind, an animal will go immediately to fight or flight. Humans have the same trigger reaction, known as "acute stress response." The body's sympathetic nervous system is on high alert. The adrenal glands are stimulated, which releases a host of hormones including adrenaline. This increases the heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing rate. As glycogen mobilizes from the liver, the body has an instant fuel source to help it run fast and generate energy. The entire nervous system is readied for action, just as if it were facing a physical attack by a predator.

Fortunately, humans are capable of rational thought, which differentiates us from every other living creature. Thanks to our intellect and our ability to guide our thoughts and even control emotions, we can escape or transcend a pure fight-or-flight response—the animal instinct. That starts with understanding our responses to fear, anxiety, stress, and other triggers.

With risk and challenge comes arousal. It is certainly important to be aroused prior to a competition or performance. A lack of excitement is sure to produce a lackluster performance, but an overdose of arousal can lead to disappointing results. The key is to be aroused enough to perform, but not overly aroused where you are overtaken by fear, emotion, and anxiety (see Figure 9-2).

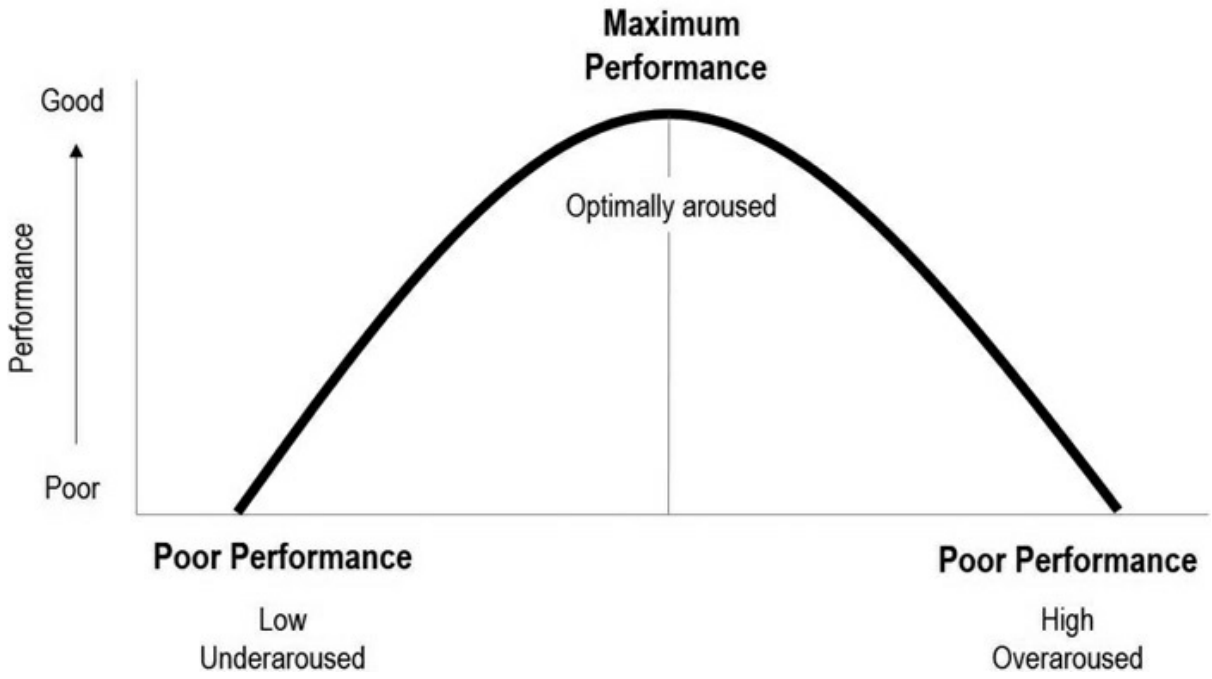


FIGURE 9-2 If your level of arousal is lethargic, your performance suffers, and if it's too high, your performance also suffers. The goal is to establish the optimal level of readiness on demand and regulate it as needed.

HEART RATE AND PERFORMANCE

When stress and anxiety put you in a state of overarousal, your heart rate soars and you cannot expect to perform well. When your heart rate reaches even 115 beats per minute (BPM), your fine motor skills begin to deteriorate (condition aroused). Your near vision begins diminishing around 175 BPM (condition impaired), and at 220 BMP (condition critical), if your life depended on your ability to dial three numbers that you may have never dialed before—911—do you think you could do it?

In one case, an officer who was administering CPR to an infant told the mother to dial 911. Overcome with adrenaline, she could not do it—not even to save her own child's life. Some individuals report dialing and dialing, then realize that they were dialing 411. And some have reported being unable to even turn their phone on, something they do every day—but not under the pressure of fear-induced heart rate increases, resulting from sympathetic nervous system arousal (see Figure 9-3).

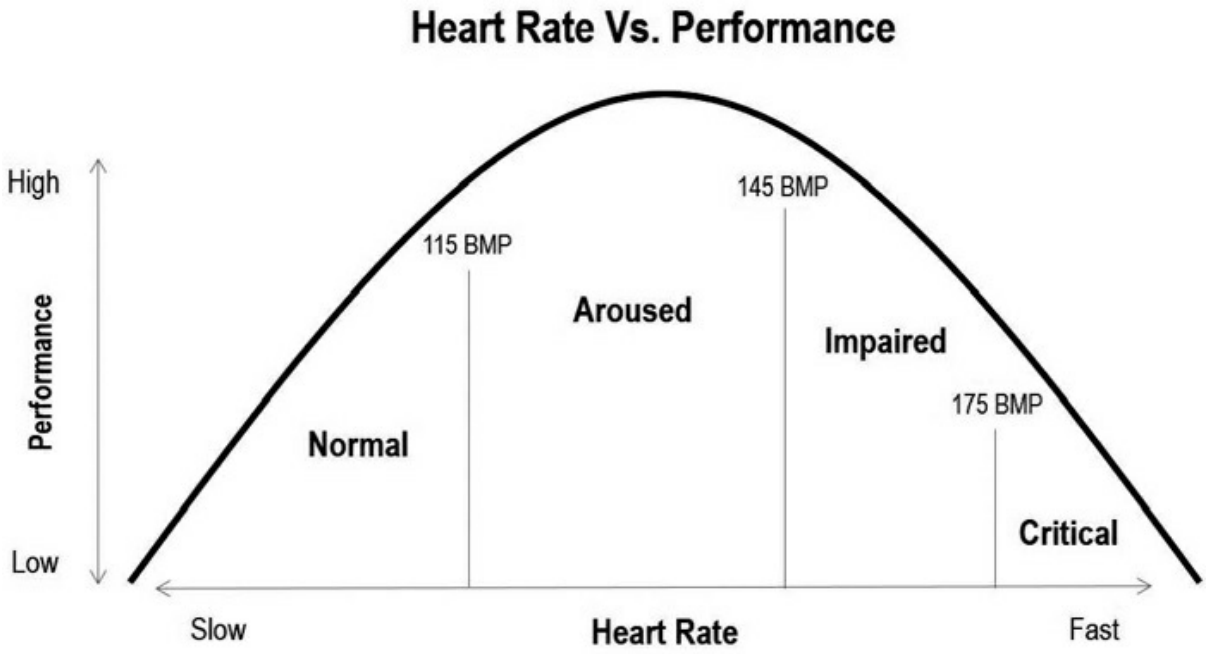


FIGURE 9-3 As your heart rate increases beyond normal to more "critical" states, your ability to perform will deteriorate accordingly.

As your heart rate increases above the range of 115–145 BPM, your fine motor skills decrease exponentially. Increased heart rate and adrenaline surges resulting from hormonal or fear-induced sympathetic nervous system arousal can cause the following:

- Perceptual distortions
- Tunnel vision and loss of sight
- Diminished sound or auditory exclusion
- Slow-motion movement and perception
- Memory loss and memory distortions

When surveyed, 8 out of 10 police officers experience tunnel vision during shootouts. This is sometimes referred to as perceptual narrowing, and as the name implies, under extreme stress the area of visual focus narrows as if the officer were viewing the situation through a tube. When police officers experienced a stress-induced heart rate increase to about 145 beats per minute, there was a significant breakdown in performance. This is not true for everyone; but for most, the range between 145 and 175 BPM represents a level at which performance suffers. Some, though, can tolerate higher heart rates.

I routinely train for shooting competitions with a pulse monitor. I typically run my heart rate up to 135 BPM or higher before I practice, to reap the benefit of accustoming myself to practicing under a highly aroused condition. As I've found, this can limit the impact of stress during competition, by preparing myself mentally and physically ahead of time.

Note: The above data are for hormonal or fear-induced heart rate increases resulting from sympathetic nervous system arousal. Exercise-induced increases will not have exactly the same effect.

WARMING UP

You must be able to recognize when you are clearly overaroused. At the same time, lethargy and weakness are other symptoms of nervousness. To counter those symptoms, you may need

to activate your body with a physical warm-up. The amount and type of warm-up needed to achieve peak readiness varies from individual to individual. Some athletes and performers need very little warm-up; in fact, too much is detrimental to their performance. The warm-up is all about becoming aware and focusing your attention on the task at hand. **No matter how well trained you are and how much you practiced, if you fail to warm up correctly—physically and mentally—your ability to apply your training will be compromised.**

The mental portion of your warm-up should begin as much as two or three days before the event. As the big day draws closer, your skills, your mental state, and your goals should become increasingly focused.

Personally, I perform best when I blow off some steam before I'm about to exert myself or go on stage. For me, it clears out the tension and allows my conscious mind to rest while activating my subconscious. Some individuals, however, like complete silence and solitude before they compete or perform, while others listen to music to relax.

Your level of arousal is also related to the degree of complexity the task requires. For example, football linemen can get by with higher levels of arousal and still achieve their goals than can the kicker whose tasks require more precision. The relationship between the difficulty of the task and the level of arousal is grounded in the fact that gross motor skills are less affected by arousal than precise tasks requiring more concentration and detailed decision making.

A weightlifter, for instance, performs a gross motor skill and, therefore, needs a much higher level of arousal to pump enough adrenaline to generate a burst of energy and strength. In addition, optimal performance and arousal tolerance are directly related to skill level. If I were to compete in a golf tournament in front of a large audience, I would be scared to death because I'm a duffer with little experience. The fear factor and high level of arousal would damage my chances of success. On the other hand, if I were asked to play the drums in front of a large audience (something I've done hundreds of times), my well-developed level of skill helps ensure I won't break down, even at a higher level of arousal, because I've practiced and performed countless times before.

MANAGING WORRY AND ANXIETY

Even while you sleep, you experience brain and muscle activity. Thus, arousal is a natural, ongoing state. However, when arousal levels become extremely high, you may experience unpleasant emotional reactions associated with the autonomic nervous system. This is referred to as stress or anxiety.

Take the example of a field hockey goalie sitting in the locker room minutes before an important match. She begins to worry about her performance, which triggers anxiety. Her worries may not even be realistic, but to the body that doesn't matter. As she worries, messages are being sent to the amygdala, an almond-shaped cluster of cells in the midbrain, that quickly activates psychological responses associated with fear, worry, and threat. Even before the source of the fear can be verified by higher brain centers, the amygdala triggers the sympathetic nervous system and begins to pump adrenaline into the bloodstream. Heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing begin to increase, and muscles start to tighten—all automatic nervous system responses. As arousal increases beyond what is optimal, performance is negatively impacted.

As for the hockey goalie, self-doubt prompts psychological and cognitive appraisals that lead her to believe her capabilities may not meet the demands of the upcoming game. It's a potent example of how worry and anxiety top the list of the most common distractions that can undermine your performance. Whether this process starts with an internal thought or an external stimulus, the amygdala triggers a psychological reaction and a full-fledged cognitive

appraisal.

AS YOU THINK, YOU PERFORM

The average person thinks tens of thousands of thoughts per day. Most of us develop a pattern of habitual thought that accompanies everything we do. This is particularly true if you have just recently experienced a series of negatively perceived performances. Thoughts such as “I never perform well in cold weather” or “I’m no good under pressure” are extremely detrimental to your self-image. If you keep thinking those thoughts, they will eventually become part of your identity.

In general, thoughts can be categorized into three groups:

1. Those irrelevant to the task at hand
2. Those focused on the task at hand
3. Those focused on the self

Thoughts focused on one’s self typically cause the greatest number of problems. **When thoughts are internally focused, you are consumed and preoccupied by concerns about your own welfare, safety, and ego. Anxiety sets in and you start to worry.** This, in turn, causes dysfunction. Anytime you perceive that a challenge is beyond your skill level, you experience worry and anxiety. On the other hand, when your skills are much greater than the challenge, you become bored or complacent and do not “rise” to the occasion. When the ratio is in balance, you experience what is referred to in sports as “flow.” Everything you do works, and performing feels effortless. Some athletes and competitors believe they are supposed to be nervous—that it’s normal. Yes, to a certain degree. But if you are experiencing the following, you are not regulating your level of arousal and anxiety effectively:

- Pounding heart palpitations
- Extreme fatigue
- Need to urinate often
- Severe nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Loss of peripheral view—“tunnel vision” or visual distortions
- Trembling
- Repeated yawning
- Confusion and the inability to concentrate and make decisions
- Resorting to old habits

JAMMING THE CIRCUITS

Are you one of those people who walk around under a cloud, expecting catastrophe? Even when things are going well, you’re still on edge, thinking that any minute it could change.

Fear of failing and worrying that you won’t perform up to your expectations can cause you to choke or go blank, like forgetting your lines on stage. When I first appeared on a major television show, I got so nervous, I forgot my own name! Anxiety and fear disrupted my cognitive control and literally jammed my circuits.

Fear can even plague the pros. Greg Norman started the last day of the 1996 Masters with a six-stroke lead and ended up losing by five strokes! Years later, Norman confessed to being tormented by thoughts of worry and anxiety throughout the golf tournament; those negative thoughts led to one of the greatest chokes in sports history. “I’m probably the only

guy in the world who thinks, 'I don't know if I can hold it,'" Norman told sports psychologist Rick Jensen.

When you are about to compete or perform, you may get distracted by thinking about the outcome, focusing on other competitors, or thinking about past mistakes you've made—or maybe you obsess over a certain score that you need to achieve that day. Or worse, you begin focusing on the things you want to avoid. These thoughts can keep you from mastering the task at hand. Your plans and routine break down as these distracting feelings rob you of your focus and intuitive feel during a performance.

During a championship in 2019, Rhino Page bowled eight strikes in a row, on pace for a perfect 300 game. As the excitement heated up and the crowd started yelling, he choked and left the ninth frame open. A nervous laugh seemed to release the pressure from his face. With the weight off his shoulders, he went on to knock down four consecutive strikes, finishing with 11 out of 12 strikes for a 266 total. Interviewed just moments later, he admitted that when things were going well, "I was just staying with the process." Then, when asked about the open frame, he revealed his weakness: "I wanted to do a good job for the crowd." He went from process to result, and once he got out of process and started *trying* to do well, his performance suffered.

KEEP A PRESSURE LOG

Worry and anxiety are self-produced. There is no anxiety, only anxious thoughts. Our perception of a situation combined with where our mind focuses creates the anxiety. You can set the stage for a poor performance by processing negative self-thoughts, which distort the situation you are about to face. Having a substandard performance during your last competition can be a source of anxiety and worry if you allow yourself to become preoccupied with your past disaster and start projecting negative "what-if" thinking: "What if I fail?" "What if I screw up?"

Not knowing what the outcome will be and fearing that you will not become what you desire threaten your sense of well-being. **With negative thoughts come negative images of your anticipated disaster. Contemplating the problem becomes your downfall.** You must intervene at the worry stage and regulate your focus and expectancy.

One way to do this is by keeping a log of your thoughts just prior to your performance or during periods of high stress—I call it the "Pressure Log." This will help you identify and analyze what you were thinking. Then you can develop a reliable strategy and routine that keeps you focused on bringing your personal best to every pressure-filled situation.

Keeping a log of your thoughts—a mental inventory and audit of what you are thinking and focusing on just before or during your big moment—can help determine what exactly is going on in your head at the most crucial times. You can even dictate what you're thinking into a recorder or your cell phone. As you look back, you can determine if your thoughts empower you or cripple you. Are you projecting negative scenarios and worrying, or are you seeing a great performance and focusing deeply on the task at hand? Over time, you'll gain a clear picture of what you think when things become uncertain or unclear.

IT'S ALL IN YOUR MIND

It's unlikely you will eliminate anxiety in a high-pressure situation. Self-reports from athletes suggest that most of them experience high levels of anxiety—and sometimes extremely high levels. Despite their nervousness, many of these athletes perform exceptionally well and

consistently close to their potential. The determining factor is how the athlete perceives the anxiety and how he or she channels the energy being generated.

Anyone can minimize the frequency and intensity experienced by learning physical and mental skills such as relaxation and breathing techniques, warm-ups, pre-routine priming, visualization, mental rehearsal, and positive self-talk. **The next time a negative or fearful thought enters your mind, ask yourself this question: "Is what I'm dreading and the negative picture I'm painting true?" The answer is always no! Because it hasn't happened yet.**

As you repeatedly interrupt your old way of thinking and replace limiting thoughts with empowering images, you will weaken the connections between those neural networks that make up your self-defeating personality. Tell yourself that a great performance won't be a fluke. "I'm supposed to be here because I put in the work and preparation. I deserve to win." With a positive self-image and a belief that you are deserving of good things, your confidence will soar. Then, instead of fearing the pressure of performing, you enjoy your big day.

WRITE IT OUT

Research shows that writing about your worries and stress can help reduce negative thinking and pressure. This expressive writing doesn't have to be long; you can write for 10 minutes before a big event, or journal for 15 minutes every week. The written word can be very powerful because, according to psychologist Matthew Lieberman at the University of California, Los Angeles, putting your feelings into words changes how the brain deals with stressful information.

In one study at the University of Chicago, students were asked to take a difficult math test while stress was induced. Pressure put on the students included offering money for stellar performance and reminding them that, if they performed poorly, they would jeopardize the chance of a partner winning money. The students were also videotaped and told that math teachers and professors would be watching the tapes to see how they performed.

Immediately after telling the test takers what was on the line, one group of students was asked to write for 10 minutes about their thoughts and feelings concerning the tests they were about to take. They were free to write openly because the writings would not be linked to them in any way. The remaining students were not given the opportunity to write, but just sat patiently for about 10 minutes while the testing materials were prepared.

Students who wrote for 10 minutes about their worries performed 15 percent better than the students who sat and did nothing before the exam.

HYDRATION IS FUNDAMENTAL

Second to air, water is the most essential resource we need to stay alive. Every cell, tissue, and organ in your body needs water to function properly. A human can go for more than three weeks without food—Mahatma Gandhi survived 21 days of complete starvation. Water is a different story. Under extreme conditions an adult can lose 1 to 1.5 liters of sweat per hour. When you lose more than 7 percent to 10 percent of your body weight, your body struggles to maintain blood pressure and blood flow to your organs. The maximum time an individual can go without water seems to be about a week, especially in difficult conditions like extreme heat. But three to four days without water could be life-threatening.

Drinking enough water is important for sustaining life, as well as maintaining your metabolism. Considering how much water Americans use, most simply don't drink enough of it. The recommendation is that women get 91 ounces of water per day and men get 125

ounces per day through both beverages and foods. This average recommended intake is for people who are healthy, not particularly active, and living in a moderate climate. You might need to modify your total fluid intake based on several factors:

- **Exercise.** If you do any activity that makes you sweat, you need to drink extra wate cover the fluid loss. It's important to drink water before, during, and after a workou exercise is intense and lasts more than an hour, a sports drink can replace mineral your blood (electrolytes) lost through sweat.
- **Environment.** Hot or humid weather can make you sweat and requires additional f intake. Dehydration also can occur at high altitudes.
- **Overall health.** Your body loses fluids when you have a fever or experience vomi or diarrhea. Drink more water, or follow a doctor's recommendation for rehydration solutions. Other conditions that might require increased fluid intake incl bladder infections and urinary tract stones.

Most people live in a constant state of dehydration. According to data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys, the average American drinks a little more than four cups of plain water per day. Research in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* says that after age three, most children don't get enough water. If you wonder if you're drinking enough water, the Mayo Clinic's rule of thumb is "if you drink enough fluid so that you rarely feel thirsty and produce 1.5 liters (6.3 cups) or more of colorless or light yellow urine a day, your fluid intake is probably adequate." Not that you have to measure your urine every day. Your fluid intake is probably adequate if you rarely feel thirsty and your urine is colorless or light yellow.

Bottom line: If you are not adequately hydrated, you are definitely not functioning physically or mentally at a peak level of performance. And don't think you can start hydrating the day you need to perform and drink tons of water to "catch up." In rare cases, drinking an extreme amount in a short time can be dangerous. It can cause the level of salt, or sodium, in your blood to drop too low. That's a condition called "hyponatremia," or what some refer to as "water intoxication." It's very serious and can be fatal.

Proper hydration begins 24 hours before the start of a physical event. The majority of your intake needs to be from drinks, roughly 80 percent, with the remainder of your fluid intake coming from foods. MedlinePlus recommends a minimum of six to eight 8-ounce glasses of fluids each day given average temperatures, humidity, and physical exercise. The American Council on Exercise suggests drinking 17 to 20 ounces of water two to three hours before the start of physical exertion and 7 to 10 ounces every 10 to 20 minutes during. Afterward, drink 8 ounces of fluid.

If you do not stay well hydrated, you run the risk of dehydration. A study published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* found that even moderate dehydration led to a significant decrease in fitness performance levels. When you start feeling thirsty, your body is already mildly dehydrated, which is why you need to drink fluids regularly and not only when you feel thirst. Signs of dehydration include a dry mouth, less urination, dark-colored urine, a headache, and muscle cramps. Mild dehydration can often be self-treated by drinking water or a sports drink, as well as sucking on ice cubes, while severe dehydration needs to be treated with professional medical care. Treat dehydration as soon as you recognize the symptoms.

SLEEP IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN FOOD

Fatigue makes cowards of us all.

—GENERAL PATTON

How long can you go without sleep? The extreme answer is 264 hours (about 11 days). In 1965, Randy Gardner, a 17-year-old high school student, set this apparent world record for a science fair project. Several other normal research subjects have remained awake for 8 to 10 days in carefully monitored experiments.

In the book *Tired Cops*, Dr. Bryan Vila tells about one study that showed that sleep-deprived people scored as badly as or worse on a reaction time test than those with a blood alcohol level of 0.10 percent, a percentage deemed legally drunk in all 50 states. **A person deprived of sleep for 24 hours is the physiological and psychological equivalent of being legally drunk. The effects can be even worse in situations when you are under pressure where you are pumping adrenaline.**

One of the fastest ways to hurt your brain is to get less than seven hours of sleep at night. Fascinating new research has shown that the brain actually cleans or washes itself during sleep. The brain has a specialized fluid system that helps to rid toxins that build up during the day, including beta-amyloid plaques thought to be involved in Alzheimer’s disease. Without healthy sleep, this waste clearance system can’t operate, thus allowing toxins to build up over time.

Lack of sleep is the second major cause of auto accidents after intoxication. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration links nearly 100,000 crashes a year to drowsiness. Airline pilots, truckers, nuclear plant operators, air traffic controllers, and many others are now mandated to get sufficient sleep for their jobs. Today members of the medical community must adhere to strict regulations that require them to get enough sleep so that they can perform their life-and-death duties.

Based on his research, Dr. Cleto DiGiovanni has cautioned that is impossible “to condition yourself to get by with a low amount of sleep.” And although getting extra sleep to overcome sleep deprivation may seem like the right thing to do, a recent Harvard Medical School study found that it’s not that easy. The study highlights the effects of chronic sleep loss on performance and demonstrates that it is nearly impossible to catch up on sleep to improve performance. According to the study, even when you sleep an extra 10 hours to

compensate for sleeping only 6 hours a night for up to two weeks, your reaction times and ability to focus are worse than if you had pulled an all-nighter. In one study, subjects who got 8 hours of sleep significantly outperformed those who got only 6 hours, and those who got less than 6 hours showed no improvement in performance. One of the most striking studies was one conducted by NASA and the Federal Aviation Administration to study the effects of short naps on pilots flying long distances through the night. The pilots were randomly divided into two groups. One group was instructed to take a 40-minute nap mid-flight when their copilots took over for them. A control group of pilots was allowed no nap at all. The non-napping pilots demonstrated reduced performance on night flights at the end of flights and following consecutive flights.

The napping pilots got an average of 26 minutes of sleep and maintained consistent performance both during the day and night and after consecutive flight legs. In vigilance tests following a nap, for example, their median reaction time improved by 16 percent. Testing at a similar point in the flight, the researchers found that the non-napping pilots demonstrated a 34 percent deterioration in reaction time. During the critical final 30 minutes of the flight, the non-napping pilots experienced an average of 22 microsleeps lasting between 3 and 10 seconds. The nappers had none at all.

The most powerful nap of all is the traditional siesta, taken between 1 and 4 p.m. when the body most craves sleep. Take a 20- to 30-minute nap, especially on days of intense work or practice. Avoid long naps. Once we sleep for more than 30 minutes, we begin to enter deep sleep. Waking from a long nap may help us improve memory and decision making, and also strengthens creativity, but it will most likely leave us feeling groggy and sluggish.

Tips for Improving Sleep Habits

1. **Be cool.** When it's time for your body to rest, there is an automatic drop in your core body temperature to help ir sleep. If the temperature in your environment stays too high, it can be a bit of a physiological challenge for your to get into the ideal state for restful sleep. Studies have found that the ideal room temperature for sleep is arou degrees Fahrenheit.
2. **Keep it dark.** Complete darkness is the best condition for getting adequate restful sleep. Invest in blackout shade
3. **Maintain quiet and be consistent.** Your bedroom should be free from any noise that can disturb your Environmental noise and new sounds can disrupt sleep. Although much of the research focuses on learning abo detrimental side effects of sound, consistent "sound" can have a positive effect on sleep as well. White nois example, can moderate intermittent noise levels and provide a consistent backdrop for more peaceful rest.
4. **Avoid the screen.** The artificial "blue" light emitted by electronic screens triggers your body to produce more da hormones (e.g., cortisol) and disrupts your body's natural preparation for sleep. If you want to give your bod deep sleep it needs, make it a rule to turn off all screens a full hour before bedtime.
5. **Avoid caffeine.** Caffeine has a half-life of three to five hours, the time it takes for your body to eliminate half drug. The remaining caffeine can stay in your body for a long time. The effects of caffeine will reduce your total time. Caffeine can delay the timing of your body clock. One study found that consuming caffeine six hours b bedtime reduced total sleep time by one hour. You should avoid caffeine five to six hours before bedtime.
6. **Be early to rise.** By waking up early you start the process of helping your endocrine system link up with the d patterns of the earth. Get up when the sun rises, and expose yourself to sunlight during the day. You should also bright light in the evening near bedtime. This will keep your circadian rhythm in check.
7. **Disconnect.** One night per week, completely disconnect from work, e-mails, blue screens, TV, etc. Be alone, warm tea, and simply be one with yourself and your thoughts.

READY, SET, LET GO!

As should be clear at this point, all the practice in the world will have only a minimal benefit if you are not ready—physically and mentally—when the "big day" arrives. From putting yourself into the optimal frame of mind to minimizing the impact of high arousal, you are ready to give the best performance possible. When done correctly and everything comes together, you know you are going to win before you ever step on the field or the stage. Now,

as we’ll discuss in the next chapter, you can let go and let your training take over. Then your “inner champion” can shine.

CHAPTER 10

PERFORMANCE TIME

Practice, practice, practice. And then, when you finally get up there on the stage, forget all that and just wail.

—CHARLIE PARKER

This is it! All the preparation, effort, and training have come down to this moment. It's performance time! In the previous three chapters, we discussed how to master perfect practice and mentally prepare yourself for a real-life performance. It's true that practicing correctly will help you develop certain skills, build muscle memory, and create a winning self-image. But now your big day has arrived. You're about to compete in a sporting event, give an important speech, or perhaps deal with a hostage situation as a member of a SWAT team. Or maybe it's something as simple as delivering a toast at your best friend's wedding. Whatever it is, the things you normally do with ease during practice can suddenly become monumental challenges when it counts most. Why is that?

One word, "pressure."

When the pressure intensifies, in a matter of seconds you can go from performing at the top of your ability to sinking to the bottom. Whether it's taking a test, pitching a client, or going for that big job interview, pressure can cause you to lose confidence and choke. The next question then is, why do we fail to live up to our potential? In other words, if practice goes so well, why does performance fall apart? How can we perform under pressure?

In his book *Winning Running*, Peter Coe wrote, "The heart may pound, but the brain must not." You have to completely embrace the idea that with all great accomplishment comes pressure. In fact, it's a privilege to be in a situation where you have the pressure to deliver a great performance or overcome a formidable opponent. **Pressure is the hallmark of champions and the gateway to opportunity; it summons us to dig deep inside for our personal best.** You rarely perform your best when you are competing against a weakling or when there is zero pressure. At the end of the day, the level of competition and the demands of a task are what make you into the best competitor you can be.

Pressure also compresses time. When you compete in an athletic event, perform on stage, or execute a task under pressure, there is very little time to think. In a high-pressure situation—sinking the shot to win or delivering a great performance—you need to make decisions instinctively. This demands that you learn to let your subconscious guide you through the pressure of a big moment and the process of execution.

World champion triple-jumper Johnathan Edwards was asked what he was thinking just prior to breaking two world records in front of a huge live crowd and a worldwide television audience of a billion people: "All I was thinking about was jumping into the sandpit." And so it should be with you. You're not focused on the competitors, the crowd, or anything else. You are fully prepared, mentally and physically, and now it's time to let that preparation pay off.

GETTING IN THE NEUTRAL ZONE

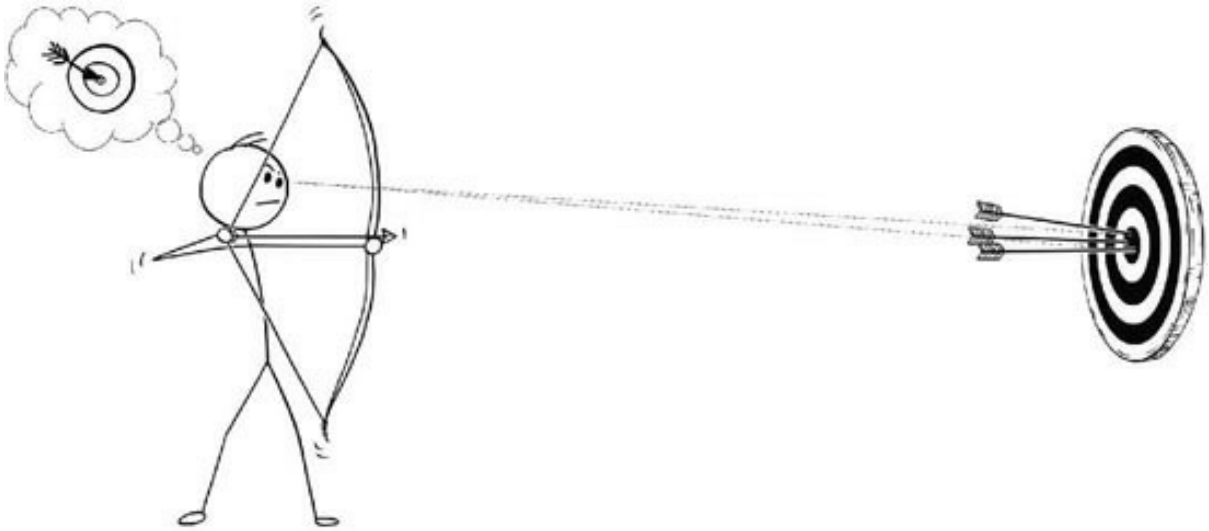
In the moments before a game, elite athletes self-induce, consciously or unconsciously, a mental state akin to amnesia. They are no longer cognizant of what is going on around them, nor are they conscious of what they've learned. They trust their training and go on automatic pilot. They get into what I call the "neutral zone."

In American football, the neutral zone can be described as the length of the football (11 inches, or 28 centimeters) from one tip to the other when it is spotted (i.e., placed on a certain spot) on the field. Players are not allowed to enter the neutral zone before the ball is snapped. Like the eye of a hurricane, regardless of what is happening around it, the neutral zone is a calm, undisturbed area. This is a great analogy for what you should aim for mentally in your own "neutral zone."

If you think, analyze, and verbalize excessively before and during a performance, you can suffer from what is commonly known as paralysis by analysis. Overthinking can actually inhibit your ability to execute and perform. In most high-pressure situations, your decisions and reactions must be automatic, natural, and spontaneous. That said, handing over the execution of a demanding task to your subconscious will be ineffective unless it is preceded by both physical conditioning and mental training. The more highly trained someone is, the less the person needs to think about what to do consciously or contemplate the specifics of carrying out a task.

For the well-trained competitor, attitude and routine are most important. Elite athletes succeed not because they exert conscious control over the body and mind; it's just the opposite. While they may exert control in the form of self-discipline and a search for knowledge during the training phase, during the actual performance stage there's a sense of abandonment. After training their minds and bodies, these elite performers learn to trust the complex subconscious mechanisms that ultimately determine their peak performance. From that place of trust, they are able to relinquish the conscious or willful controls that inhibit the cellular processes. And so it must be for you: When you're on your game, you won't be thinking about the mechanics of how to execute.

When experts perform skilled tasks, they are less focused on specific bodily movements and more focused on their rhythm and routine. Nonexperts, in comparison, tend to focus on the specifics and the minutiae of the required task. For example, expert archers focus on the center of the target, whereas novice archers focus on the placement of their hands on the bow and strings. Whatever the physical performance—playing a sport such as golf or tennis, doing competitive shooting, or playing a musical instrument—whenever you are too concerned with the position of your hands and feet, or you concentrate on specific movements at the expense of feel and rhythm, you undermine your ultimate goal of striking the ball, hitting the target, or getting all the notes right.



As you step on the track, the court, or the stage, no matter what task you engage in, you need to de-emphasize your intellect. Instead, trust that you have prepared to function at your best. Trust your training, and turn the direction of your movements over to your "right brain." You only have to get out of the way and allow your mind and body to come together as one and function at optimal levels. Let your subconscious take a dominant role, and the images you have created through mental rehearsal will operate automatically.

TUNING INWARD

In his book *The Winning Mind*, champion javelinist Steve Backley describes the rush of emotions he experienced when he first showed up at the Olympic stadium in Barcelona:

> *I filled up with fear. The emotions I expected doubled when I actually arrived. I was unable to control my mind's thoughts and so, without focus, I was aware of too many things around me, like the size of the crowd and the announcer's voice over the stadium's speaker system. I suddenly found myself in a confused state, unclear about both the competition's procedure, and my own carefully thought-out mental preparation. I began to focus and block out what was around me, particularly remembering a good training session I had carried out recently. In other words, I relived the past in order to get a feeling of confidence. Within 5 minutes I was in a far better and more relaxed frame of mind.*

That's your goal, because you must learn to "tune inward"—even if a bee is buzzing around you, noises distract you, the crowd is much larger than you expected, and a high-ranked competitor shows up. Suddenly, the conditions are very different from when you were practicing or what you expected and prepared for. These distractions can easily throw you off your game, if you allow them to. **When you compete or perform, the environment almost always throws unexpected circumstances at you—all types of things like sounds, smells, and other distractions that you did not prepare for, because you can't prepare for everything.**

You must have a routine that turns your attention inward and insulates your focus from external distractions. All great performers have a process for tuning inward. The following six steps will help you remain in a peak state, prepared, focused, and tuned within.

STEP 1. FIND YOUR OPTIMAL EMOTION FUNCTIONING ZONE

The first step is to know where you need to be in terms of the emotions you bring to the big day, because in sports and in life, emotions run the show. It only makes sense that how you feel impacts how you perform; e.g., feeling confident is much better for performance than feeling uncertain. But did you know that there are positive emotions that can hurt your performance and negative emotions that can help? While the example we'll discuss here is a composite for ice hockey, this emotional analysis applies to just about any sport and a wide variety of endeavors.

In Figure 10-1, starting at the far left, we see that the emotions listed for Low Functionality Zone 3, "Dysfunctional N–," are clearly negative (N) and make performing more difficult (hence the minus sign after the N). Feeling tired, sluggish, depressed, lazy, and uncertain would do nothing to sharpen your competitive edge or bring out the best of your skills. In fact, I can't think of any endeavor from ballet to boxing that would benefit from being sluggish!

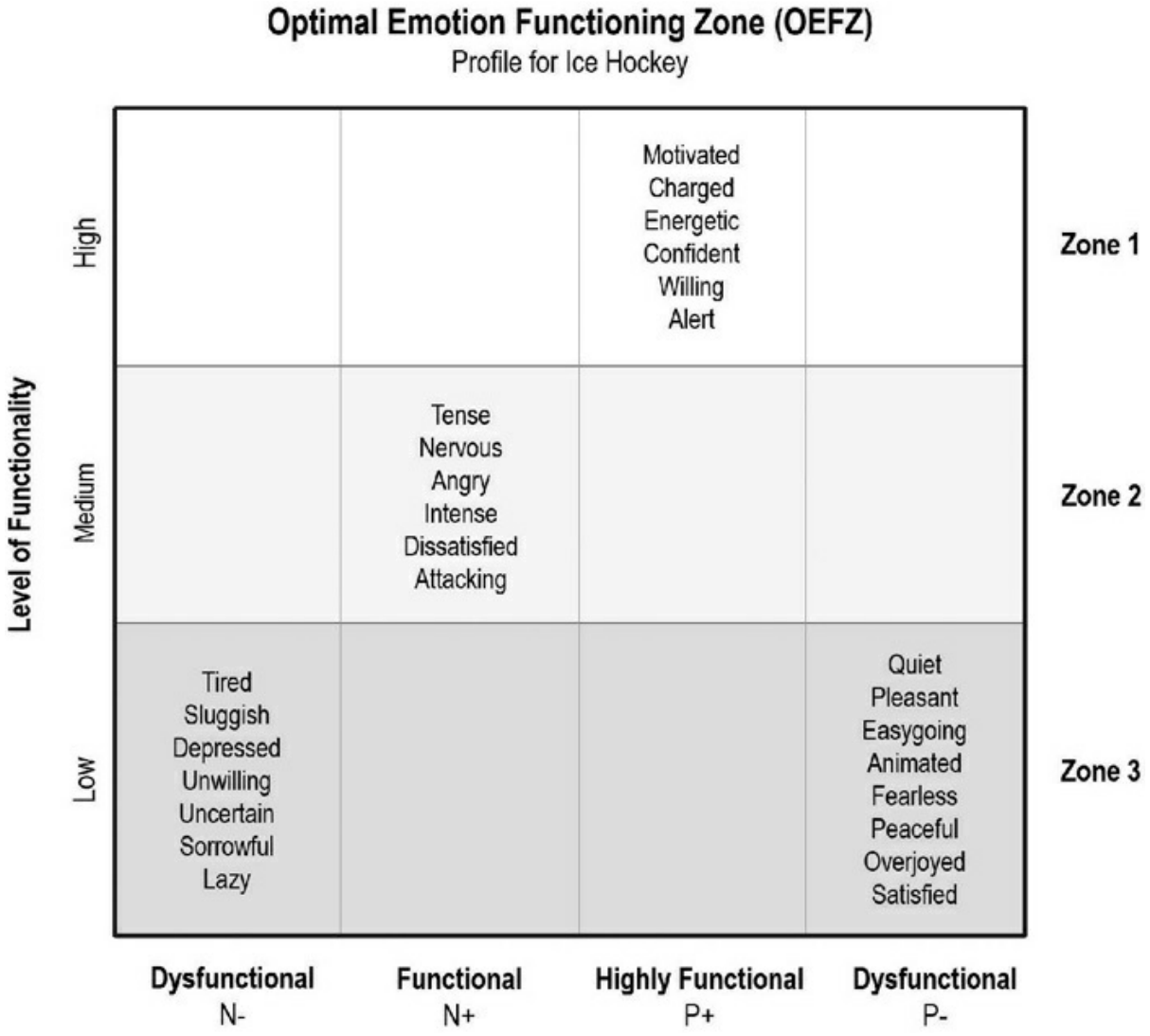


FIGURE 10-1 For ice hockey, the optimal emotion functioning zone shows which emotions contribute to or undermine performance.

Now things get interesting. On the far right, still in Low Functionality Zone 3, is

"Dysfunctional P–." The feelings listed are positive—pleasant, easygoing, peaceful, satisfied, overjoyed, etc. While these are certainly good feelings to have, they're not going to help you when it comes to competing in ice hockey. That's why they're marked "P" for positive but with a minus sign to indicate they, too, undermine or detract from performance. So while these are positive emotions, they're negative performance drivers. Think about it: Being pleasant might make you popular at a social event, but in competition you need an edge. You'll also notice that "fearless" is on the list. No one in a high-risk situation—from Navy SEALs on a daring mission to an extreme-sport competitor—should feel completely fearless, because that can lead to unnecessary and foolish risk taking.

Remember, the goal is to get into the optimal emotion functioning zone, tapping into those feelings that can boost performance and minimizing those that detract. While it depends on the sport or activity, it's interesting to see how in something as intense as hockey, some negative emotions can actually help performance.

The emotions listed in Medium Functionality Zone 2, "Functional N+," are negative emotions—tense, angry, dissatisfied, and even nervous—that are positive performance drivers when it comes to building your edge. They bring out the fire in your belly to compete and win. If you're facing off in the Stanley Cup Championship, it's far better to feel intense and attacking (N+) rather than peaceful and overjoyed (P–).

At the pinnacle is High Functionality Zone 1, "Highly Functional P+," where the emotions both are positive and improve performance. Here you'll find emotions such as motivated, charged, energetic, confident, willing, and alert. These emotions are the strongest performance drivers that will help you feel and perform like a champion.

Get into Character

Getting into your optimal emotion zone doesn't just happen. Just as you have a pre-performance routine—e.g., stretching and doing warm-ups before a run—you need to get yourself mentally and emotionally into the right frame of mind to engage and perform at your best. **The ability to switch channels requires mental awareness. Keep in mind, it's what you do mentally and physically that sets the proper conditions. Your thinking and your physiology will help create these emotional zones.**

In the heat of competition, most people have no clue about what is going on inside them, mentally or even physically. Under pressure, they're so nervous they get emotionally hijacked and start thinking disempowering thoughts as they anxiously fidget and lose touch of their mind-body connection. If they could only shift their attention to creating the optimal emotions and attitude! Then that nervousness would decrease, and outside influences would become far less a distraction, allowing them to become more focused and ready.

Think of finding your optimal emotion functioning zone as "getting into character," the way an actor does. Actors drop their own personality and take on a new one, consistent with the role they're playing. Getting into character is a routine, both physical and mental. It comes down to awareness and focus. You know what you feel now—and what you *want to feel* in an optimal state. Using your mind and body, you create that framework to perform (see Figure 10-2).

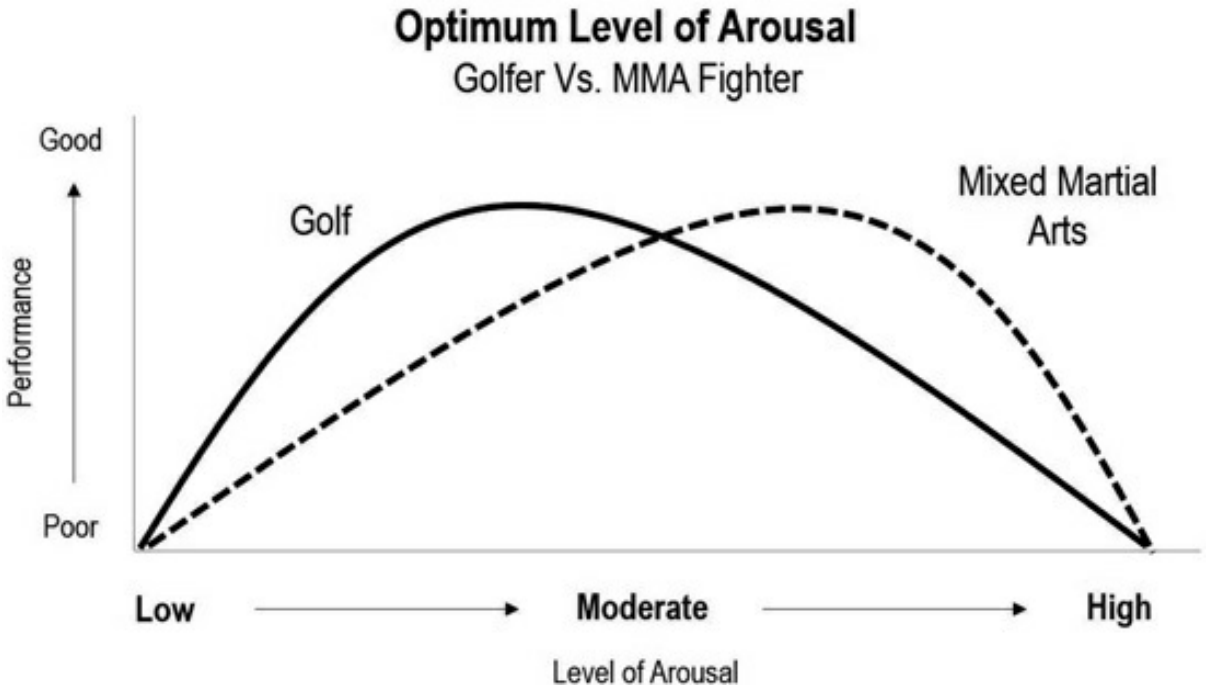


FIGURE 10-2 Using the comparison of a golfer versus a mixed martial arts (MMA) fighter, we see the impact of arousal—from low to moderate to high—on performance in each sport. The optimal level of arousal for the MMA fighter would not be of much help to the golfer about to make a delicate stroke.

The emotional and physical repertoire for an MMA fighter entering the Octagon is likely much different from that of a golfer on the PGA Tour or a ballerina who is going to perform in the *Nutcracker*. The anger (N+) that helps in hockey or other contact sports may be too much negative emotion to benefit executing a pirouette at the Bolshoi or to sink a 30-foot putt at the Masters. The best performance-driving emotions will differ from sport to sport and person to person. It's all about getting yourself into the proper attitude to give yourself an edge and prepare to perform at a peak level.

STEP 2. MANAGE AROUSAL WITH BOX BREATHING

In the weeks leading up to a competitive event or on-stage performance you've been preparing for, you probably feel excited and confident. But as the day draws nearer, and particularly just before the event, negative thoughts start creeping in. Thoughts such as "Don't screw this up" or doubts like "Have I prepared enough?" can dominate your mind. Anxiety and worry take hold. This is precisely the time you need to take control of your mind and body, and that starts with your controlling your breathing.

Your breathing can be particularly useful as a grounding anchor to help you manage and move through difficult, unpleasant, and negative thoughts and feelings. By focusing on your breathing, you will accomplish two very important things: (1) You will slow your heart rate and regulate your level of arousal. (2) You will focus your attention in a neutral space, and that will keep you from obsessing over negative thoughts and external distractions, because the mind can only focus on one thing at a time.

When stressed, we have a tendency to hold our breath or otherwise restrict the natural air flow. This is problematic, because while you're trying to perform, your muscles tense, and other automatic physiological changes, such as increased sweating and elevated blood pressure, are also occurring. If you are not breathing optimally, this combination of bodily changes and stress makes it difficult for your body to function and perform well. Box

breathing can help change all this.

Box breathing is simply inhaling through your nose for a count of four, holding your breath for a count of four, exhaling through your mouth for a count of four, and holding again for a count of four. Repeat this cycle over and over for at least five minutes, or as long as it takes to bring your heart rate down and calm your nerves. This technique is used extensively by Navy SEALs when under extreme pressure in training and during battle. It's important to count in your mind during each phase (inhale—1, 2, 3, 4; hold—1, 2, 3, 4; exhale—1, 2, 3, 4; and hold—1, 2, 3, 4), because by focusing on the count, you are tuning out everything else, including your own rambling conscious mind. Once you learn to breathe properly, you can use this technique before and during performances, or anytime you feel stress throughout the day. As you focus on breathing and counting, the outside distractions will disappear, your heart rate will decelerate, and you will feel a sense of warmth and readiness. A good book to learn more about breathing techniques is *The Power of Breath* by Swami Saradananda.

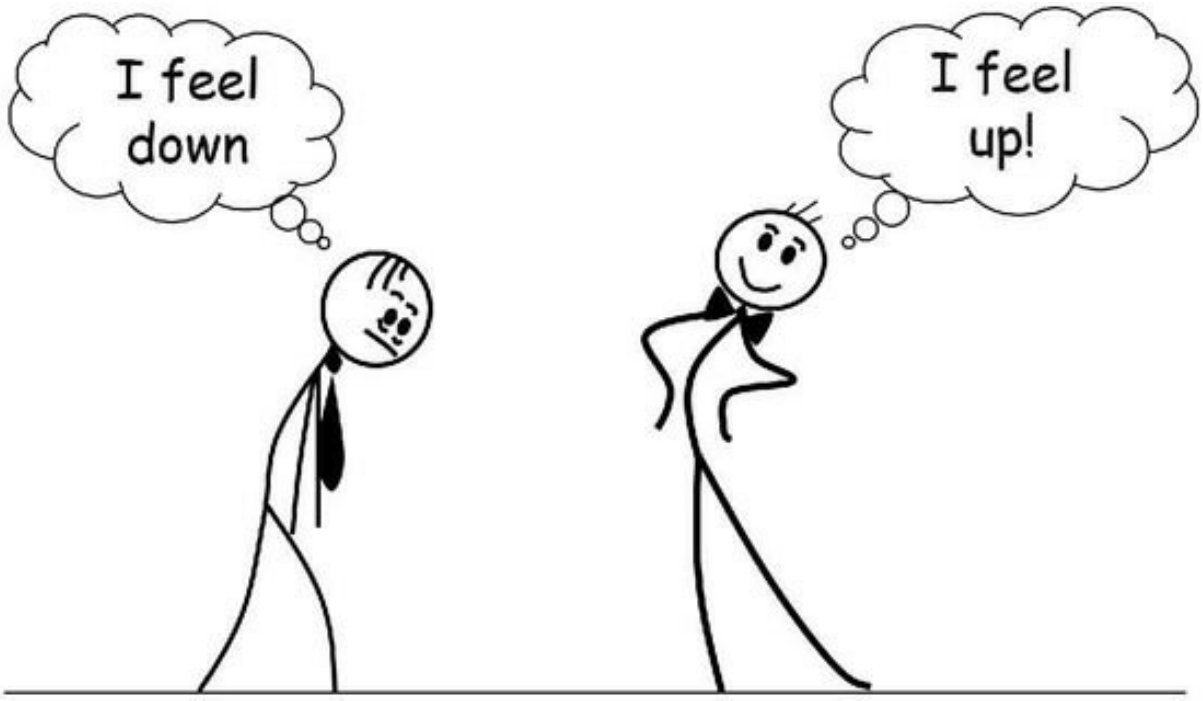
STEP 3. DICTATE BODY POSTURE

We know that our minds can influence and even change our bodies, but can our bodies change our minds? The answer is yes. Body language is an important part of how we communicate with the world; more importantly, body language also influences how we think and feel about ourselves. Studies show that body language affects our thoughts and emotions. For example, research shows that just as being happy makes us smile, smiling makes us feel happy (a phenomenon known as the "facial feedback effect"). That's right; you can change your mindset using your body. It turns out that pretending to be powerful does make you feel powerful, just as pretending to be sad makes you feel sad.

Your behavior is a result of the state of mind you are in. When we feel strong and powerful, we will attempt things that we would never even think of trying if we felt weak, tired, and fearful. **Physiology is one of the most powerful tools available for instantly changing one's state. You cannot be powerful without powerful physiology.** When you alter your physiology, you get an immediate shift in the way you feel, and it works without fail. If you change your physiology—that is, your breathing, your posture, your facial expression, and your tonality—you immediately change your internal representations and the way you think and feel.

The effect is even more powerful than we once thought. Modern research suggests that body posture and certain poses can even change your hormone levels. One study found that holding a power pose for two minutes increased testosterone by 19 percent and decreased cortisol by 25 percent, mirroring the levels measured in powerful people. Power posing is effective in high-stakes situations such as job interviews, stressful social encounters, public speaking engagements, and sporting events. Amy Cuddy, author of the book *Presence*, reports power posing for just two minutes can increase both your confidence and your enthusiasm in these difficult situations.

Try this: Sit down, slump your shoulders forward, hang your head down, make a serious face, and think of something really terrible. You'll slip easily into negative thoughts. Now, stand up—chin up, chest out, shoulders back—and smile broadly while you try to think about that same terrible thought. You don't feel nearly as negative! **Your physical body posture is just as important as your presence of mind; they affect each other.**



Even a small shift in body language or conscious focus can make a difference. Research conducted by Samuele Marcora, PhD, found that even slight and subtle mood influencers can alter athletic performance. In a study involving well-trained cyclists, Marcora flashed either happy or sad faces on a screen as the riders pedaled at full speed. The faces flashed for just a fraction of a second—so briefly, they were only recognized by the subconscious. Still, those who were exposed to happy faces performed better than those exposed to sad faces.

So how do you know you're in an optimal body posture? Think of what you do when you feel confident, relaxed, and in control. Chest out, chin up, and shoulders back, with a confident swagger. Smile and project an "I'm a badass" attitude. Hold this pose for at least two minutes right up to the moment you are about to perform, while you visualize your best performance.

Try it! You will feel more confident, and as a result, you will perform better.

Conduct a Body Audit

As you become more conscious of your body posture, you can make notations in your "Pressure Log." Write down how you postured your body before you were about to compete or perform. Few people are aware of this, and even fewer understand its importance, so they are unwilling to make that little extra effort and study themselves. Winners, however, look for every edge.

Are you expressing a powerful, confident self? Or are you slumped over and hanging your head down or nervously and visibly anxious? If you want to perform at the highest level, you need to know the truth about yourself. Combine the right mix of emotions, powerful body posture, and controlled breathing, and you'll increase awareness, optimize your body-mind connection, and improve performance.

STEP 4. CONTROL SELF-TALK

Anytime you carry on an internal dialogue with yourself, such as giving yourself instructions, saying reinforcing things to yourself, or interpreting what you are feeling or perceiving, you

are engaging in self-talk. This dialogue can occur out loud or inside your head. Self-talk such as “This is my day,” “I deserve to be here because I am prepared,” and “This is my time” can be an asset and help regulate arousal and anxiety, while keeping you focused. Or it can be a liability. When your negative self-talk (“Don’t mess up” or “Don’t miss”) is frequent, it can disrupt the intuitive performance of your developed skills.

A study of junior tennis players found that negative self-talk is associated with losing. According to prominent cognitive behavioral psychologist Albert Ellis, negative self-talk becomes especially destructive when athletes apply labels such as “loser” or “choke artist” to themselves. When athletes hold these negative self-perceptions, they will often behave in ways that will confirm these expectations.

Research proves the point—even when the intention is to give positive instruction but uses negative terms. In one study, individuals who were putting in golf were told what *not* to imagine. Their instructions included not imagining hitting the ball short of the target and not imagining undershooting the target. The result was poor performance. Why? Because even though the message was supposed to be what not to do, the focus was still on the negative—undershooting and being short of the target.

Likewise, coaches should refrain from negative coaching or giving verbal feedback such as “Don’t pop up” (in baseball) or “Stay away from the out-of-bounds on the left” (in tennis). These well-meaning, yet negative, coaching commands can create mental blueprints in athletes’ heads of the exact performance the coach is suggesting that they *not* do.

On the other hand, Olympic athletes indicate that positive self-talk fosters positive expectancies and helps focus attention. Your self-talk should be related to the task and focused on what you’re trying to achieve, rather than on the physical mechanics of what you’re doing. In *The Courtside Coach,* Bryce Young and Linda Bunker suggest that a server in tennis should think or see the “deep outside corner” to specify the landing area of the serve. Similarly, a baseball pitcher might think “high and inside,” or a free throw shooter might simply say, “Arc and swish.”

There is a basic rule of thumb when you engage in self-talk and imagery. Keep everything positive. Always keep your thoughts constructive and task related—visualize success. Body posture, self-talk, visualization, and breathing work hand in hand. One affects and reinforces the other. It’s your job to direct your thoughts, your emotions, and your inner dialogue.

In his book *Peak*, Dr. Marc Bubbs writes:

> *Serena [Williams] uses positive self-talk and “power thoughts” to dial in her focus and keep her confidence high during tennis matches. A few years ago, Serena could be seen during the game change-overs in her matches reviewing a small notebook in her lap:*
>
> > *“You will win”*
> > *“You will add spin”*
> > *“You are #1”*
> > *“You will win Wimbledon!”*

Bubbs goes on to point out that if one on the greatest female tennis players needs mental practice, what does that say about the rest of us?

Thought Stopping and Shifting

Even as you become aware of the power of your thoughts and self-talk, it’s unrealistic to assume that you’ll never have another negative thought. The fact is, negative thoughts and

self-doubts surface all the time. But with discipline and practice, you'll become more highly aware and adept at stopping negative thoughts and shifting to positive thinking.

An example I've given before is when I compete in pistol shooting. When you draw a pistol from a holster and shoot a target in less than one second, it's easy to slip into thoughts of shooting yourself in the leg or foot (because we usually know of someone who did). That fear sometimes expresses itself in the thought, "Don't shoot yourself." When that happens to me, I immediately stop the negative and shift to the positive: I tell myself instead to "draw smooth" or "clean and fast." I visualize drawing the pistol skillfully with a perfect grip, nailing my target like a tack driver.

STEP 5. RUN YOUR HIGHLIGHT REEL

Some top performers use video highlight reels of their best performances and then watch them before they are about to perform or compete. This is another way to vividly revisit past successes while building confidence and mental muscle memory. As you watch the videos and relive your best performances, you imprint positive images into your subconscious.

I make a compilation of video clips from my best performances; then right before I'm about to compete, I watch them. This focuses me on what I did correctly and puts fresh in my mind my awesome moments, so I can do it again. Try it—you'll find it's an incredible confidence booster.

It's best to view your highlight videos right before you are about to compete or perform, because this is the time when fear, doubt, and negative thoughts can start to creep into your consciousness and undermine your confidence. Even those who have a positive attitude can get nervous right before an important performance because of the pressure and proximity of the event. If you let it, nervousness could cause you to shift your focus to what not to do or what you are afraid will occur. And that's the last thing you want on your mind, because where your focus goes, everything else follows.

Professional baseball player Todd Helton is one of the biggest stars ever on the Colorado Rockies, with a career .316 batting average, 2,519 hits, and 369 home runs. Eight seasons into his seventeen-season career, Helton started using an iPad loaded with video clips of all his hits. He explained, "It's good to watch right before a game . . . I can see my good swings, so I'll have a good feeling going in. I view it on the plane, on the bus, and sitting at my locker."

Video reinforces mental imagery to help you generate feelings of performing at your best. It helps keep you mentally sharp and boosts your confidence. **Watching a "highlight reel" of my best performances just before I'm about to compete or go on stage is my absolute favorite confidence booster.** This puts the "movie in my mind" of what I am capable of doing and what it looks like when I perform at my best. Then, when I perform, I subconsciously bring in the sights, sounds, and feelings of confidence to that moment.

In the same way, use video to develop your mental imagery. While reviewing your past successes, try to verbalize what you were thinking and how you felt when you executed that performance. Really experiencing a successful performance soon after it has occurred is perhaps the best way to establish the bodily association of how a peak performance feels. When you program your body with that reference point, it is easier to prepare mentally for future performances equal to or better than your previous ones.

Here are a few tips on how to use video most effectively:

- **Focus on your best performances.** Although you can learn about what you nee work on by watching your mistakes, I recommend that at least 75 percent of the vic you watch of yourself should be of great performances. And just before an event, should watch only positive video clips. Seeing your best performances allows y mind and body to absorb positive images and feelings, while creating a templat emulate.
- **Don't get overanalytical.** Instead of thinking about the videos (i.e., analyz critiquing, and evaluating), just allow yourself to experience the overall images of g performances and the feelings they trigger in you. Let the video images flow thro your mind, without excessive thought, and into your subconscious where they r

need to be.

- **Reverse polarity.** When you view a poor performance on video, here's a g exercise: As you're watching yourself having difficulty, try to recall what you v thinking and the self-talk that was taking place during the toughest part of performance. Most likely, when things are going badly, you'll revert to negative s talk. By watching yourself on video and seeing where you had a problem, you reverse the polarity of your thinking. Then verbalize aloud positive self-talk as watch things get bad. This will get you into the habit of shutting down negative s talk and reinforcing yourself with positive self-talk in response to difficulty. On "c you will learn to shut down the critic inside you. If there's going to be any type of s talk or images going on inside your head during a performance, they must be posi and empowering, especially during a crisis. Remember, where your thoughts everything else follows. This will help keep you from falling apart under pressure from getting "emotionally highjacked." You will learn to respond to pressure v personal power.
- **Review before competition.** I cannot stress enough the importance of visualizatio the competition site itself and, if you can, watching your awesome moments on vi With every good performance I have, I update my "highlight reel." Then, 5 o minutes before I compete, I watch the video, seeing myself executing everyt perfectly. Watching the compilation of your best performances, and if possible, with sound turned up, will activate your senses to relive the experience of your successes
- **Watch other great performers.** You can learn a great deal by seeing g performances demonstrated by your favorite athletes and professionals. Ima yourself playing that game or undertaking that performance. Take what that g performer does well technically and tactically; then incorporate those movements techniques into your own performances. For example, the easiest way to get tuned the correct rhythm is to copy someone else who has a good rhythm and who is n proficient than you.

STEP 6. GO THROUGH YOUR PRE-PERFORMANCE ROUTINE

Anybody who has ever watched a professional baseball game knows the drill. A batter gets up to the plate. He adjusts sleeves, taps the bat on the plate, tightens the Velcro on his batting gloves. These pre-performance routines are a very important ritual to engage physically and mentally. It's more than a warm-up; it's a process of engaging the conscious and unconscious mind, so when that ball comes across the plate (or the equivalent of whatever you need to "hit" in your performance), you are ready.

Rafael Nadal, one of the greatest tennis players in the world, is known for a series of pre-match rituals (how he enters the court) and, before every shot, a series of motions of fiddling with his hair and his clothing. Some people have dismissed these as superstitions and others as time wasters. Nadal, however, says these pre-game and pre-shot rituals are absolutely crucial to his focus and performance.

What may look like a case of OCD (my wife, watching a televised tennis match with me, once remarked, "What's wrong with this man?") is a very smart case of sports psychology. With these rituals and motions, Nadal programs his body and his mind for performance. He sets himself for every shot, every return. Even if the tennis match goes six hours, he does this routine again and again. This keeps his focus and insulates him from environmental distractions. As noted earlier, the mind can only focus on one thing at a time. So while Nadal

is focused on fiddling, he can't be focused on anything else. And while he distracts his conscious mind, his subconscious is unblocked.

Golfers are known for similar behaviors—tapping their shoes, stepping back and approaching the ball, wiggling the golf club; it's called a "pre-shot routine." This isn't something that just happens. These behaviors are developed maneuvers that get repeated over and over, and they are as big a part of the golf game as the shot itself. This is how pros relax and get into that familiar zone where performance becomes instinctive and automatic. And this is what shuts out those outside factors—crowd noise, birds chirping, shadows, and other distractions—until they are invisible.

Elite performers can't allow anything to break their focus, especially when facing a competitor who is at least equally matched and quite possibly has the edge. They need every ounce of focus and ability—mental and physical—to rise to this challenge and win. The Olympics, for example, are an incredibly distraction-rich environment, from the media to medal celebrations to the general buzz of the Olympic Village. Sports psychologists say it's important to manage these distractions. Their research demonstrates something athletes have known for years: pre-performance rituals help athletes feel less anxious and stressed. As a result, they end up performing better. The same is true for you. You need a routine (it can be as subtle as a little pacing and positive visualization) that puts you in the zone, blocks out the "noise," and sharpens your focus. If you don't have a pre-performance routine, start developing one.

Picking a Point of Focus

On the subconscious level, our brains can fire off neuron connections and carry out 20 quadrillion calculations per second. A typical computer can handle only a mere 2 billion per second. Now, guess how many things the conscious brain can focus on at any one time? Only one or two.

In his book *Master Your Brain*, Phillip Adcock suggests trying this exercise: Visualize waves washing onto a beach. Then add in the sound of waves crashing on the sand. And finally, imagine the smell of salt in the air. When you try to focus on all three at once—sight, sound, and smell—you can't do it!

Research tells us that most humans can't do more than one or two attention-demanding tasks at the same time without doing one of those tasks very poorly. Earl Miller, a professor of neuroscience at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, also says that for the most part we simply can't focus on more than one thing at a time. Compared with unconscious processing, conscious thinking is extremely slow, at a rate not much faster than you can speak. That's why you can't entertain two conversations at once or write an e-mail at the same time you are talking on the phone.

Let's say you are about to run an obstacle course. If you try to think about the first, second, third, and fourth obstacles, you will overwhelm your conscious mind, which blocks your subconscious. Then you make errors on routine movements that you practiced hundreds of times successfully. That's because during practice you weren't so concerned with failing, so you allowed your training to take over.

A strong point of focus at the beginning sets the conscious mind into action. **All you need to start is to focus on one thing, one movement. Once you hit that mark, your subconscious takes over, with behaviors that have become so engrained through perfect practice, they're second nature.**

Running a Mental Program

Just as I'm about to compete or perform, I start my pre-performance routine. Just like pushing "play" on streaming media, the video starts and plays the same every time. I visualize a successful outcome. I utilize a cue word such as "smooth," take a deep breath, and pick my point of focus. I do this to put myself in the neutral zone, a mindset that is focused only on the current moment. I let my training and instincts take over.

Your pre-shot routine should combine posture, breathing, self-talk, and visualization. Here's an example of how you might apply this as you are about to serve in a tennis match:

1. Spin racquet three times and ready your grip.
2. Bounce the ball four times.
3. Visualize the ball making contact and the ball "kicking" up into the opponent.
4. Take a deep breath.
5. Think "deep outside corner."
6. Pick a point of focus.
7. Cue word.
8. Execute the serve.

With your pre-performance routine, you're getting out of your conscious mind and you let your instincts and training take over. And to do that, you need to distance yourself from external distractions and the noise in your head—the negativity and the worries and the environment around you. You let your subconscious mind take over. You've worked hard, and you deserve to be here. Bring it all together: body and mind, focus and discipline. Trust your training and be the champion you have worked to become. You're a winner!

LETTING GO

Much is written about the preparation or training stage prior to a performance, but little attention is given to that moment when you need to let go. This must happen in the minutes and seconds just before you are about to compete or perform. It's a critical stage, because it's when most people get nervous and go blank. But don't let "going blank" get you panicky, because that's precisely what you're supposed to do. The problem is, most people panic and try to fight it.

There is a common misconception about the meaning of letting go. It doesn't mean whatever happens, happens, nor should you relinquish responsibility to fate. Nothing could be further from the truth! The goal is to perform uninhibitedly during actual play, just as you did during practice.

Performing at a high level must be natural, intuitive, spontaneous, and virtually automatic. Great performances are realized when the performer is not calculating and thinking. Once the game starts, the bell rings, or the curtain rises, the automatic mind must take over. This is the essence of letting it happen rather than making it happen.

Once you train your mind and body with perfect practice and build the self-image of a winner, you learn to trust the subconscious and unblock its power to deliver peak performance. Out of this trust comes the willingness to relinquish conscious controls that inhibit intuitive genius. Zen teaches us to de-emphasize the intellect and to develop and trust our intuition with the goal of unifying ourselves with our actions. When your mind adopts an attitude of noninterference, you become like a boat smoothly gliding down a river.

To tap into the subconscious and make the rehearsal more intuitive, you can hum or whistle a melody in your head while going through the paces of your training. Try it—anchor a song into your practice; then, come performance time, hum that tune as you perform. This will help put your conscious mind in a familiar place and allow the subconscious to execute in a relaxed state.

Negative thoughts are the ultimate obstacles to letting go. When you are about to

perform, almost any thought that is focused positively on the present moment is better than a negative thought. Even no thought is better than a negative thought. Negative thoughts put you everywhere but the present. All negative thoughts are rooted in memories of the past or concerns about the future. **The principle reasons for not letting go fall into four categories:**

1. **Outcome focused.** Concerned and focused on the outcome, the performer is not fully engaged and, in the mome concentrating on the process and execution. This causes the performer to be "tight" and movements mechanical performance will likely be played cautiously and fail to get anywhere close to peak potential.
2. **Living in the past.** The performer worries about past mistakes, and the fear of repeating such mistakes in performance. Again, this causes the performer to be "tight" and movements mechanical. The performance will be cautious and played safe.
3. **Overtrying.** The performer tries too hard, thinking that the harder the effort, the better the outcome. The thinki "If I push harder than the others, I will beat them." Not true. We practice hard and perform easy. Did you ever someone say, "She makes it look so easy?" Great performances are smooth and efficient.
4. **Overly aroused or distracted.** The performer is overly aroused and excited. Excessive arousal becomes a sour stress. Distractions become a problem when you fail to have a well-developed routine that you execute automatic

Adversity, pain, and misfortune are equal opportunity employers. They work everybody. The real question is not *will* bad days occur, but rather how you will deal with them when they do. How prepared are you? When something happens to us that we don't like, we attach a bad thought or feeling to it. And conversely, when something happens to us that we like, we attach a positive feeling to it. The problem with this thinking is that it puts us at the mercy of external events. What if on the day you have something very important to accomplish, your "bad day" arrives? You need to take control and make sure you don't get hijacked.

Everything I shared with you up until this point should get you prepared to deal with every situation like a pro. With practice you will get increasingly better at executing the mental and physical techniques in this book. In the final moments, though, you must trust it and let go.

Here's what it feels like to let go, comments compiled from the experiences of hundreds of Olympic and other champion performers:

- "I have minimal or no thoughts about what I should do."
- "I feel insulated from all distractions."
- "There are no issues such as worries about failure."
- "Everything is happening automatically and working for me."
- "The result is not an issue in my mind."
- "Even though I am completely in touch with everything, I feel strangely detached f what I am doing."
- "I feel I have all the time I need to respond accurately and well; time seem disappear."
- "All the things around me, like sounds, smells, and the presence of people, becon source of power and energy."
- "I am focused like a laser beam."
- "It is a wonderful feeling that is crisp and full of joy."

IT'S SHOW TIME!

You have put so much time, effort, and energy into getting to this point, it's time to shine. You have no reason to doubt yourself—not if you've put in the hours and you've engaged in perfect practice. Don't overthink it! Relax and let go. All you need to do is get in the zone

and let your amazing self emerge.

BONUS CHAPTER

LIVING WITH INTENTION

All champions, all success stories, come from people who knew exactly what they wanted to achieve and then accomplished it. Maybe not initially, but once they set their intention, they went from goal setting to goal getting. This power is within each and every one of us, and it doesn't require permission, a special talent, or a university degree.

Like me, one of my personal role models, Richard Branson, only attended school until his mid-teens. Branson, battling dyslexia, struggled academically. On Branson's last day at Stowe School, Headmaster Robert Drayson told him he would either end up in prison or become a millionaire. Drayson was proved wrong on both accounts. Branson did not go to prison, and he went on to become a *billionaire*. The founder of Virgin Group, which controls over 400 companies, *Sir* Richard Branson was knighted at Buckingham Palace for his services to entrepreneurship.

In seventh grade, I tried to use a calculator in class (a very rare piece of equipment at the time). My math teacher announced that I was lazy and would never amount to anything. He said, "Machines will never think for us." Years later, after reading a cover story highlighting my success as a stock trader, that same teacher called my office and apologized to me. I must have made some impression on this man for him to be able to recall the incident so many years later.

In the case of Branson's headmaster and my math teacher, educators, meant to teach and inspire, misunderstood our intentions and underestimated our potential.

By now you know a lot about how I live my life and how I have achieved and maintained my success. Now I want to share with you exactly how I focus on goal getting at a level that may surprise you. We've talked a lot about achievement, but now we are going to dig a little deeper into becoming a real champion, a champion human being.

I practice harnessing the power of intention every day. In the beginning, this daily routine feels like a chore, but it quickly becomes a habit. The best version of yourself—available to you all the time—will be revealed. You just have to unlock the access. The following will help you do that. The key is intention.

WHAT IS INTENTION?

Most people assume intention means working toward a goal. In the broadest sense, they're not wrong, but there's more nuance to it. Wayne Dyer says, "When sorcerers beckon intent, it comes to them and sets up the path for attainment, which means that sorcerers always accomplish what they set out to do." In other words, our intention creates our reality.

When I'm talking about intention, I mean *committing to awareness*, a daily mindfulness for lifetime achievement. Go back and read that again. **When you have intention, you are living it all day, every day. You don't just have a goal; you are truly committing to maintaining an awareness of self-actualizing the very best version of yourself.**

You are making a promise to yourself that you will train your brain to be consistently tuned in and turned on to your *purpose*—living as an authentic human being, which doesn't just happen automatically; it requires a mindset. In his book *The Biology of Belief*, Bruce Lipton establishes that your brain is strong enough to overcome the influences of early conditioning and programming you may have unwittingly adopted over the years. With work and daily practice, you can change your mindset.

Philosopher Lao-Tzu observed that when we are born, our nature—every human being's nature—is perfect; but after years of immersion in the world, we easily forget our authentic self and take on a counterfeit nature. What good is having money and success without purpose and authenticity? What good is having goals if you are not going to think about them and actively work toward them? This is about creating a future by your own design. That's the difference between being a dreamer and being a successful achiever: The achiever will actually *do* something about the dream. That starts with a daily intentional kickoff.

AUTO-NEUROTIC VERSUS INTENTIONAL KICKOFF

From a daily practice perspective, intentionality starts with ditching the neurotic habits that most people have developed so you can adopt a thoughtful actualization and an intentional kickoff instead. Most people, though, start their day with what I call an auto-neurotic kickoff, and some run through the entire day on auto-neurotic pilot. This means most people wake up and have stress reactions to the stimuli surrounding them. The alarm goes off, and they immediately hurry and worry about just getting ready and out the door. They feel like they have no time, so they make no time for thoughtfulness about what may lie ahead nor for what they want to accomplish in the day. Auto-neuroticism carries through to each part of their day. They react stressfully to traffic, snags or glitches, and people standing in their way.

If your day starts with an automatic stressful reaction, you are setting yourself up to be in a cycle of anxiety, aimlessness, and control by outside forces. You merely go through the motions of the day, and for the most part you respond like Pavlov's dogs. You stop being an active participant in your life because you don't start as one. If you want to live with intention, you have to break that cycle.

The intentional kickoff is the first part of the standard operating procedure I utilize every day to proceed and live with intention. What follows is a step-by-step guide.

MORNING PRIMING: 10–15 Minutes

Every morning when I awaken, the first thing I do is box breathing. I breathe in through my nose for four seconds, hold it for four seconds, breathe out through my mouth for four seconds, and hold it for four seconds. All the while, I'm focusing on nothing more than the count. I follow this pattern of breathing for a full, uninterrupted five minutes. There are apps that can assist you with this.

Next, I spend three to five minutes in visualization. I begin by thinking about the day ahead and visualizing every part of it. I'll prioritize what I want to achieve for the day and make sure that there is at least one thing I can accomplish that will advance me toward my long-term plans, even if it's just a step closer. Knowing I'll be taking steps to achieve my intention as part of my daily priorities means the day won't be wasted. *I have a goal for the day that complements my intention, and I visualize myself achieving it.*

The next five minutes are spent on mental rehearsal. This can sometimes take less time depending on the day. As I think about what my priorities are, I'll also consider the different ways they can show up and how I will respond.

Here's an example using my stock trading. Let's suppose the stock market is going to

open down big because of some global news event, and I have a large financial exposure to the market. I spend those few minutes rehearsing how I will deal with potential losses and the pressure of my stock positions moving against me. Now, when I get behind my desk, I'm mentally ready and prepared.

Finally, I spend my remaining time asking myself a few relevant questions. What can I do today to get me closer to my goals? What obstacles might I face today, and how can I react? What am I thankful for, and what is really important to me?

Priming kicks off a chain reaction of thoughts and awareness that helps you get focused and stay centered throughout your day. As Tony Robbins said, "This is not positive thinking BS; it's about what actually changes biochemistry." As a self-preservation mechanism, our survival programming or hardwiring is always looking for what's *wrong*. It's our job to create our reality and our own happiness and consciously focus on what's *right*. That starts with mindfulness as soon as we open our eyes in the morning. After sleep, priming is the next step for centering, focusing, and readying our nervous system.

Morning priming is the polar opposite of just rushing out of bed and out the door. It only takes a few minutes per day, and it can change your life, particularly if you combine it with what I'm about to share with you.

CHECKING IN: Throughout the Day

This is where the practice gets a bit more difficult, but it can pay big dividends in terms of living with intention and building discipline. As I move through the day, I check in regularly with my intention. I take a moment to gauge how my thoughts, actions, and interactions with others align with—or oppose—my intention. If I am on track, I can encourage myself to keep doing what I'm doing. If I'm off track, I can course-correct by recommitting to my intention.

If you are just beginning this routine, it's a good idea to set an alarm on your phone for every few hours to remind yourself to check in. You may even want to download an app that can help prioritize your day and automatically send you check-in reminders. This can help ensure you are moving toward your main vision, being the best version of yourself through constant habitual awareness.

Becoming a real champion requires having a champion mindset, and that means being a champion human being. As a champion, you are in a position to lead. Checking in with your humanity is how you go beyond champion thinking to champion living. Tuning in to your authentic self will develop the most productive habit of all—the habit of feeling and living connected.

Fred Rogers from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* famously said that in emergencies or situations that would scare him, his mother advised him to always look for the helpers. This is great advice for the rest of us. For example, if there is a house on fire in the neighborhood, look for firefighters and emergency medical technicians who show up to rescue people and treat any injuries.

Even in the toughest circumstances, helpers show up to show us that there is always a way up and out. You don't have to look past what's happening; look around and inside it. You'll find the helpers, you'll find the humanity, and you'll find the goodness. In the process, you will find your authentic self and learn to look at a situation and see what's *right* about it. Be grateful for the situation you're in, good or bad, and say, "Thank you for presenting me with this lesson and opportunity."

GIVING THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

Now this is where it gets even more challenging! Instead of reacting to the things people say

or do—judging them or getting angry—we give them the "benefit of the doubt." We think (and act) positively, not negatively, to what is occurring. That's the goal!

Let's take a closer look at this. As you were driving, if you saw a family stranded on the side of the road in the rain, would you stop to help? Or if someone was having a heart attack, would you help this person—or get mad at the person for disrupting things? I hope the obvious answer to these hypotheticals is, "Why, of course, I'd help them! I'm not going to get angry at someone in distress."

Then why get angry at the person with road rage who gives you the finger? This person is in pain—injured in some way. It is unlikely that it has anything to do with you. Yeah, maybe in the moment, the person is acting like a jerk, but that's a result of injury and pain. **At least once a day, give someone the benefit of the doubt who may not deserve it. You may be thinking, why would I give someone a pass for being a jerk? Because it's not for the person; it's for you!** It's about learning how to practice "presumed empathy." This is the first step to living in a state of grace and becoming a true champion.

You can build homes for the poor, help our veterans, or donate to charity, but real kindness and love are in your heart, not just in your wallet or in things. It's doing the things that don't make you feel good. These are the real tests: loving your enemies, forgiving the unforgivable. Giving someone the benefit of the doubt means recognizing another person's humanity and acknowledging the common ground you share as human beings.

There are many opportunities to give the benefit of the doubt every day. Maybe you went out to lunch and the server messed up your order, perhaps even forgot to communicate to the kitchen about your food allergy. Instead of getting mad, give the server the benefit of the doubt. Give the server the chance to fix it and tip generously. You may want to say something like, "I noticed you're having a tough day, so I tipped you extra. I hope you feel better." You never know what people could be going through or what battle they're fighting. Your server might be a single parent who was up all night with a sick child and simply can't function on zero sleep. If you complain to the manager, that server could lose the job and the only source of income he or she has.

If you give people a chance to make things right, you might just be giving them the encouragement they need to make it through another day or see the good in someone else. Try to help them. Haven't you ever done things that you weren't proud of? Haven't you ever had a bad day? It's likely that you were in pain. This is where empathy comes from: recognizing the pain of others because you've been there, too.

It's easy to be nice to the people who agree with you or to those who are kind to you. Take a real challenge; forgive someone who doesn't deserve it. Try giving the person the benefit of the doubt. In the process, you may help someone have a better day, and that makes life better for us all.

Many lessons come in disguise. Not every teacher is necessarily standing at the front of the classroom, demanding your attention. Struggles and things that annoy you are often your best teachers. You might get stuck in traffic behind a little old lady who refuses to go more than 15 miles an hour. There's no passing her. There's no forcing her to speed up. She's your teacher; she's testing you. Can you remain graceful? Can you embrace it? Can you look beyond your anger and ask, "What is she teaching me in this moment?" Maybe she's there to remind you to slow down and have patience. As Ferris Bueller famously said, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

Here's another example. Let's say you've finally gotten through the traffic and made it to the grocery store. You've picked up all the things on your list and are in line at the checkout. This line looked short, but up front a very chatty person is holding court. You don't feel like chatting. The cashier is nodding and smiling politely. Chatty McChatterson just keeps going. You feel your blood pressure rise and are sure that the ice cream in your cart is starting to

melt . . . Stop—Chatty McChatterson is also a teacher. The lessons here are that it's okay to share a few pleasantries to make the cashier feel appreciated. Or maybe you've just been given some time to look over your items and realize you forgot something. Or maybe you've been given the chance to reflect on how fortunate you are to have the food you are about to purchase and to have family and friends with whom to share it over dinner and conversation.

Teachers are everywhere. Opportunities to give people the benefit of the doubt are everywhere. Always take a moment to assess your situations and see what's *right* about them. This is all a part of checking in with your intention and your humanity. This is how you become the best version of yourself: a true champion who transcends money and material success.

PRIMING FOR A BUSINESS MEETING

If you're headed into an important meeting, the stakes may be high. You might be dealing with your biggest client. It could even be adversarial, maybe involving litigation. Or perhaps you're going for a job interview, and you really want to make a great impression. Whatever the circumstances, priming for that encounter can help you calibrate your center and shift your focus to the best possible outcome. The same basic steps of Morning Priming apply here. Breathe, visualize, rehearse, and question.

The challenge for a lot of people is that they tend to go on the defensive when under pressure. If negotiations are involved, they become combative. But if you go in with the auto-neurotic response of "doing battle," that's exactly what you'll get—a battle. Priming helps you take the opposite approach. If you want to move toward solutions, try going into a meeting with an attitude of genuine love for humanity. In your visualization, picture a positive outcome—not just a victory for you, but a win-win for all involved. When your attitude and actions align with that vision, you'll completely surprise and disarm everyone!

Here's one way it works: If you meet someone who is angry, you shift your thinking toward compassion. If you don't know the reason for that person's anger or negativity, you make one up: "That person is having a bad day—her child is sick; he's worried about a loved one's health." Or you assign positive attributes to the person: "That person is a really loving grandparent. He always puts family first . . ." You may not know any of these things, but you assign the benefit of the doubt. You could also try to defuse the situation by making it comedic. There are times when I encounter someone who is hostile and angry, and I immediately picture the person in my mind as "Grumpy," one of the Seven Dwarfs from Disney's *Snow White*. If you remain positive and genuine, you won't get dragged down by negative energy, and more often than not, the person actually gets friendlier. The key is to be a leader who can elevate any situation, not a neurotic knee-jerk responder.

My advice to "come from a place of love" surprises some people. They know me as a high-performance Wall Street guy, and that's what they're expecting. Seeing me as someone who is taking the spiritual high road is a shocker. The truth is, I've tried it both ways. I've learned that whenever you have the choice to be kind or nasty, always choose kind. After one of my recent Master Trader seminars, a man from India approached me after hearing me talk about mindset and priming. "I was expecting Gordon Gekko [Michael Douglas's character in the movie *Wall Street*], and instead I got the Dalai Lama," he told me. I assured him that I'm no Dalai Lama, but I thanked him for what had to be the greatest compliment I'd ever been given in my life.

REFERENCING TO THE WHOLE

A cancer cell will destroy other individual cells and ultimately will destroy itself. Why? Because a cancer cell has no reference to the whole. It "thinks" only about itself, and in the process, it destroys itself and everything around it. Does that sound like a good way to live? We have brains and can make choices. We know better. We know that what is bad for one human is bad for humanity. Once you understand and embrace this basic concept—that we are all connected—you can understand the power of referencing to the whole.

Yes, we can compete in sports and business, and there will be winners and losers. But in between, we live our lives among others. We rely on each other. Even our opponent is giving us an opportunity to play our best game and win.

Recognizing that humans are parts of the whole, that each person is a part of your humanity—these realizations will make you look at each individual a little differently. With that feeling of connection, you find love in your heart; you will love yourself even more and feel deserving of success, which is the most important ingredient for succeeding.

This isn't about being charitable or healing the world; it's about building personal discipline and positive expectancy. You can set your intention on anything you wish, but I have found these humanity challenges to be the most rewarding and the best food for the soul.

EVENING REFLECTION: 10–15 Minutes

Finally, at the end of the day, it is all about honest reflection. It's time to drill down and get to the truth. Essentially, evening reflection is like a personal audit. Just as I did in the morning, I'll start with five minutes of box breathing: Breathe in for four seconds, hold it for four seconds, breathe out for four seconds, and hold it for four seconds. Concentrate only on the count until every other thought just fades away.

Now I look back at my day and ask myself, "Did I move closer to my goal today?" I examine my actions for the day and whether or not I ticked off any of the tasks I set for myself as a part of achieving my long-term vision. If I missed anything, I ask myself why I missed it and how I can tackle it tomorrow.

Did I check in with myself throughout the day? Did I give at least one person the benefit of the doubt? Did I go through my day gracefully? What did I learn from the teachers who "emerged" that day? How can I use what I learned today to move closer to my goal tomorrow? This is a time to reflect and ask powerful questions. Because when you ask the right questions, you get the right answers.

And there it is: converting days into a full life. If you spend roughly 20 to 30 minutes a day following this standard operating procedure of Morning Priming, Checking In, and Evening Reflection, you are on your way to becoming an auto-actualizing person. Shrug off the auto-neurotic skin you may have been wearing and see the things in your life as the opportunities that they are.

Follow this practice for just a few months, and I promise you will be on your way to becoming the best version of yourself. At the very least, you will know what the best version of yourself looks like and what you need to aim for; you will feel more deserving of success, and as a result, you will move in the direction of your dreams.

AS POWERUL AS A TRIM TAB

Jeff Bridges is one of my favorite actors, and a man who has mastered the mindset of a champion who lives with intention. I can't help remembering his acceptance speech at the 2019 Golden Globe Awards for the Cecil B. DeMille Award for outstanding contributions to

the world of entertainment. It included a reference to something called a “trim tab,” which is involved in the steering process of a large ship.

In his speech, Bridges said: “One guy, he had nothing to do with the movies, but I’ve taken a lot of direction from him. That’s Bucky Fuller. He’s most famous for the geodesic dome, but he made a great observation about these oceangoing tankers. He noticed that the engineers were particularly challenged by how to turn this thing. They got this big rudder that took too much energy to turn the rudder to turn the ship. So, they came up with a brilliant idea. Let’s put a little rudder on the big rudder. That little rudder will turn the big rudder; the big rudder will turn the ship. The little rudder is called a trim tab.”

Bridges went on to explain that the trim tab is really a metaphor illustrating the intrinsic connection each individual person has to the society at large. Essentially, the little things can influence and have power over the big things. Each person has the ability to affect the direction of the whole of humanity, to change the world.

Bridges’s profound words were about the power of each and every individual. He is a trim tab. You are a trim tab. I’m a trim tab. Everyone is a trim tab. We each have the ability to shift the larger rudder and steer the ship. Therefore, we all share a responsibility for the ultimate destination and outcome of our journeys.

If you want to stay on course, it’s important to prime your intention in the morning, check in throughout the day, and then reflect before you go to sleep. This will help you navigate your life with mindfulness and maintain purpose. In total, it should only take about 30 minutes a day. And those days add up to a lifetime. Embrace your inner trim tab. Steer yourself, set your compass toward your intention, and change the trajectory of your life and the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Minervini is one of the world's most successful stock traders and an international performance coach. He is a former U.S. Investing Champion and the author of the best-selling books *Trade Like a Stock Market Wizard* and *Think and Trade Like a Champion.* Starting with only a few thousand dollars, Mark turned his personal trading account into millions, averaging 220 percent per year with only one losing quarter for 5 consecutive years; an incredible 33,500 percent total return. To put that in perspective, a $100,000 account would explode to more than $30 million.

Mark is featured in *Momentum Masters: A Roundtable Interview with Super Traders* and in Jack Schwager's *Stock Market Wizards: Interviews with America's Top Stock Traders.* Schwager wrote, "Most traders and money managers would be delighted to have Minervini's worst year—a 128 percent gain—as their best."

Mark educates traders about his SEPA® methodology through Minervini Private Access, an online platform that allows users the unique experience of trading side by side with him in real time. He also conducts a live Master Trader Program where he teaches his trading system in a comprehensive weekend event.

His performance coaching and investment seminars attract people from all over the world who want to learn his approach to winning.

You can learn more about Mark at www.minervini.com, and you can follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/markminervini.

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SPECIAL DEDICATION

I'd like to end this book with a story that's become a legend in my family. Uncle John, my mother's brother, was a corporate salesman for Fuller Brush. He was the original straitlaced guy who appeared to be living the perfect American life. Then one day, some 40 years ago, Uncle John decided it was time to pursue his dream.

John had traveled to the Middle East to assist with humanitarian relief. His wife, my Aunt Yael, had lived through the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts of the 1970s. Despite the apparent perfection of his picket-fence life, John wanted something else, and Yael was supportive of him. John wanted off the grid to return to a simpler lifestyle that was in tune with nature. To do this, he needed to learn from a master. He went to the Cherokee Nation in North Carolina and told the longest-living medicine man alive, Amoneeta Sequyah, that he wanted to learn to live according to Native American traditions. The medicine man told him to go out the back door of his cabin and walk to Telaquah, Oklahoma, and when he returned, Amoneeta told him, "You will be one of us and understand what it is like to be American Indian." Thinking the medicine man was speaking metaphorically, Uncle John went home to ponder these words. After a while, he returned to speak with Amoneeta again. He explained that he was very serious about adopting this new lifestyle and living according to Native American traditions. Again, the medicine man told him the same thing: Take your horse and walk to Oklahoma and back; then you will know what it is like to be one of us.

This time John realized that it was a literal instruction. And so began a quest for Uncle John and Aunt Yael, walking thousands of miles from North Carolina to Oklahoma and then back again. Along the way, they realized that their path was a personal reenactment of the Trail of Tears, the forced removal of the Cherokee people from the southeastern United States in the mid-1800s to government reservations in the West. An estimated 4,000 Cherokee people died from hunger, exposure, and disease along that Trail of Tears.

My aunt was pregnant, and the trip was so hard on her, she suffered a miscarriage right on the trail. They called the infant "baby blue" because he was born the color blue. This did not stop them. They continued on the Trail of Tears, literally leaving their own trail of tears.

After completing that journey, Uncle John and Aunt Yael were accepted by the Cherokee community. Today I'm very close with their children, my cousins. Whenever we speak, we always reflect on the powerful example Uncle John gave to us for setting big bold goals and believing in them so strongly that you don't let anything stand in your way. Uncle John and Aunt Yael made huge sacrifices to attain this dream. They went fearlessly into the unknown and stretched themselves well beyond their comfort zones or what most would ever sacrifice.

As he lived within the Cherokee community, Uncle John became an ambassador for Native Americans and an activist for Native American rights. He passed years ago, but his memory lives on as an example of what can happen when you have a big dream and commit yourself to doing all you can to achieve it.

This is a special dedication to one of the most unique and passionate human beings I knew growing up as a child, my Uncle John Beck. May he rest in peace.

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